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ABSTRACT

This manual, written by a classroom practitioner, addresses concerns frequently voiced by beginning teachers. It is designed as a practical approach to what works in the classroom. The chapters focus on the following issues: Classroom Management; Classroom Discipline (student behavior, easy ways to establish control, major issues, calling home, and insubordinate behavior); Lesson Plans; Markbooks (managing time, markbooks, and marking policy); Why Teach? (a changing profession); Questions (involving students in answering questions); What to Teach?; Homework (homework, notebooks, quizzes, classroom decorations as instructional devices); Can Johnny Read That?; Varying the Presentation; What Works? (effective teaching methods); and Other Subject Methods. (SM)

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Notes From The Trenches

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to students.

Introduction

This manual, written by a classroom practitioner, attempts to address concerns frequently voiced by beginning teachers and is designed as a practical, no-nonsense approach to what works in a classroom.

"What are the characteristics of a good teacher?"

Many student teachers have told me the professional demands of teaching seem staggering to them, and sometimes they doubt they will succeed. My response is always the same. Relax, and have faith in yourself. You wouldn't have gotten this far if you didn't have the talent to teach, and if your professors and supervisors didn't have faith in you. Teaching is both a science and an art, but it is a science and an art that can be learned.

In an attempt to short circuit that learning process and hoping to model success, student teachers often ask, "What are the characteristics of a good teacher?" Would it were that easy, but, unfortunately, there isn't a single answer to that question because there are as many different kinds of successful teachers as different kinds of successful medical doctors or successful accountants. Yet, if you can't imitate someone's personality, you can learn from their practices. And good teachers do seem to have one thing in common.

They have taken instructional theory and put it into practice in a way that works for them. The key is, *what works for them*. And while they analyze their own practice, they don't equate that analysis with their success. They would scoff if you told them they are theory users. But they are. They've internalized theory, and integrated it so completely into their personalities and classrooms they are at a loss to explain why, or even what, they do that makes them successful. Researchers, working backwards, observe good classroom practitioners and develop instructional guidelines.

"That's not new," teachers say, when they read of a new development, "I've been doing that for years." And so they have been.

Recently a student teacher told me about two teachers she had observed. Teacher X's class was obviously successful; Teacher Y's less so. "Why?" I asked. What did one teacher do that the other teacher did not do, or perhaps, the other way around. The student teacher could not analyze that, but she revealed what she considered qualities of a successful teacher. "Both teachers were friendly," she said, "both seemed prepared, but with Teacher X the class went like clockwork, while for Teacher Y, the second hand stuck" She

"That's not new," teachers say, when they read of a new development, "I've been doing that for years." And so they have been.

hypothesized the difference might be the students, not the teachers.

"If students and teachers were interchanged, what would happen?" I asked.

She thought about it for awhile. "I see what you mean," she said, "the good class would become a little more unruly, and the bad class would be a little easier to manage."

"Conclusion?" I asked.

"Teacher behavior and practice makes a difference," she said

True, but what in that behavior makes the difference? I suggested she observe both teachers again, and record everything she could: what the teachers said, what they did, and what the students did. She returned two days later with notes, observations, and some thoughts.

"Teacher behavior and practice makes a difference," she said.

Teacher Y had to settle the students at the beginning of the class. She called the role. Some students had been absent the previous day and hadn't received yesterday's worksheet. When the teacher asked, "Who doesn't have a worksheet?" five students shouted at her. She went to her desk, got the worksheets and distributed them. By this time, other students were tired of waiting and began to chat. Teacher Y had to call everyone to attention again. A student

came in late, without a pass and the teacher returned to the desk and adjusted the mark book. There was no punishment for being late. One kid shouted, "If he can be late, I can be late." The class had to be called to attention again, and Teacher Y finally started the lesson. Elapsed time about five minutes.

Teacher X had none of these problems. There were instructions on the board as the students walked in: students expected to have these instructions and responded to them. One student came in late, nothing was said. Without interrupting the teacher, the student wrote his name on the detention list on the board in plain view of everybody. He had detention the following morning, nothing needed to be said. A student took the attendance from a seating chart, and the teacher checked it later for accuracy. As in the other class, there had been some students absent the previous day, and material had been distributed. The teacher had copies in his hand, and did not ask, "Who needs a worksheet?" but said instead, "If you don't have yesterday's material, please raise your hand." Four students did, the copies were distributed by the teacher, and class was underway. Elapsed time to start the class was about one minute, and it didn't have to be started again.

"It's the little things that make a teacher successful," she said.

"Conclusion?" I asked.

"It's the little things that make a teacher successful," she said.

I wish it were that simple. It's the big things that make a teacher successful. If a teacher has nothing to say, or can't say it in a sound manner, or won't take the time to understand students, the little things won't help that much. But it is the little things that make it possible for the teacher to do the big things successfully. In other words, it all begins with classroom management.

In other words, it all begins with classroom management.

Classroom Management

If asked, most experienced teachers would probably tell you, without reflecting too deeply about it, that good teaching comes down to good classroom management. But if you push them further, they are likely to admit that management skills open the door to good teaching. These skills are the beginning, not the end, of the important stuff that happens in a classroom. By themselves, they don't mean too much, but without them a lot that happens in a classroom won't mean too much, either. Without good management skills, the magnetic sign placed on the refrigerator door in early September, "God, Let Me Make a Difference", will be replaced in October by "God, Help Me Make It Through The Day." So what are the skills which keep your mental outlook positive and open the door to good teaching?

Let's define classroom management as the structuring of the environment in a business-like way that contributes to learning and eliminates down time.

Let's define classroom management as the structuring of the environment in a business-like way that contributes to learning and eliminates down time. Good management skills are the result of common sense and the continuous monitoring of your own practices. When things go wrong, don't blame the fates. You're responsible for what happens in your classroom. Identify the problem and design ways to deal with it..

Once you've identified the problem, *class did not start on time, homework wasn't done, too much chatter, etc.*, think

about ways to solve the problem at its source. It's trite to suggest you should be active and not reactive, but the keys to good management are the little things teachers do to turn off problems before they begin.

One year, my eighth period classroom looked out over the front of the building and the senior parking lot. In the middle of May, with all the windows open there was a problem. Busses would pull up to take kids home, students whose school day was over at the end of period seven would congregate by their cars and wait for their friends, cars would peal out to get to the beach first, and the students sitting next to the open windows, very naturally, would look out , wave to their friends, and pay very little attention. These seniors had been accepted to college, had the course passed, and at this point of the year, had their own agenda. Closing the windows on the sunny side of the building in May was not an option. What to do? Simple. Move the desks back from the windows, draw a chalk line on the floor, post a note on the board, *No desk beyond this line*, and the problem is solved.

...the keys to good management are the little things teachers do t turn off problems before they begin.

There is the other choice, of course. I could spend four weeks telling Billy to pay attention. Or my favorite teacher *non-sequitur*, "Billy, stop that." Billy will look at you with total innocence and maliciousness. "Stop what?" he will say.

"Stop looking out the window."

"I wasn't looking out the window." He will then proceed to take you down whatever maze his mind is able to

devise. Don't play. Solve the problem before it becomes a distraction.

Classroom management is like housework, not very glamorous, but don't do it routinely, and eventually you'll run out of clean dishes. Don't manage your classroom routinely, and eventually you'll run out and read the want ads. Actually, it's your classroom and your students' classroom. You can expect to learn from them, in the same way they expect to learn from you. Every June, you should know more about teaching, students, and yourself. To learn from students you need to trust them, believe in them, respect them, and challenge them. I've been a classroom practitioner for almost 40 years, and I'm still amazed how much students can accomplish when challenged and then given the opportunity to meet that challenge.

You can hear kids saying to themselves, " Why should I bother to pay attention, if you're not sure you're able to teach me?"

To learn from you, students need to trust you, believe in you, and respect you. And it's difficult to be respected, if you're perceived as weak, unsure, or not in control. If that occurs, you become fair game Human nature is the same, one size fits all. Were you very different in high school? Or even graduate school? You can hear kids saying to themselves, "Why should I bother to pay attention, if you're not sure you're able to teach me?" Understand this about teaching. One of your jobs is to get students to do things they need, but don't necessarily want, to do. They will do as little as possible unless you create a structured and open environment for them.

How much structure? As much as you need to control a given class. The concept of a structured classroom is in disfavor because of the myths surrounding it, and one of the worst myths is that a structured classroom is a rigid classroom. In a rigid room, structure dominates learning rather than facilitates it. Students rarely feel comfortable enough to make mistakes, and it is difficult to learn without the freedom to be wrong. Without a degree of comfort and acceptance, kids will give you only the answers they are absolutely sure of, the ones they think you have in your head. There is little discovery, little interaction, little comfort for students or teachers in a rigid classroom.

There is little discovery, little interaction, little comfort in a rigid classroom.

Students seem to learn best when they can interact freely with the teacher, with the material, and to, some extent, with each other. As a teacher, you can be as open and creative in a classroom as you wish, as long as you provide the structure to support that openness and creativity. How do kids learn about the structure and management in your room?

Students seem to learn best when they can interact freely with the teacher, with the material, and to, some extent, with each other.

Since student teachers usually begin working with their cooperating teacher after the school year has started, they often are at sea when they have to start the school year with their own class, so the first day of school is a good place to start

Let's start with the basics.

Let's start with the basics. And there can be nothing more basic than who sits where and why. It's your first day

of your first year as a teacher. Do you know where your seating chart is, what it looks like, and why?

Hypothesize: You are teaching 11 grade Social Studies, and it is first day of class. You have a list of 30 students, alphabetized by computer. Students pile into your class and before the bell rings, one of the smarter ones, testing you, asks, "Where do you want us to sit?" Your answer will tell that kid, and the class, a lot about you. Without thinking about it, you'll probably say, "For the time being, sit anyplace." Not an unreasonable question, not an unreasonable answer. But you've responded like Teacher Y. How much more professional for you to say, "For the time being, I am seating you by alphabet. Your names are listed on the board in front of each row, find your seat quickly, we have a great deal to do." You'll be further tested by the kid who can't hear a thing unless he sits next to his buddy. Your answer is obvious, "No problem. I'll be happy to move you as soon as I get a list of disabling conditions from the nurse." You want to be reasonable, friendly, but also savvy.

Your answer will tell that kid, and the class, a lot about you.

Let's assume textbooks are in your classroom and your school uses a textbook control card on which students' names, address, phone numbers, and book numbers can be written, and a student contact card, usually a 3 x 5 index card which will contain pertinent student information. You need to do the following things the first day:

a) Arrange for seating.

b) Arrange textbook distribution

c) Complete textbook control cards

d) Complete contact cards

e) Explain class rules

f) Explain what kind of notebooks you want kept.

g) Leave enough time for a small lesson

h) Be sure you have a homework assignment, even a brief one.

i) Be sure students know they will have a quiz tomorrow.

And you have 40 minutes to do all this. Then you have five minutes to set up for the next class. Consider for a few minutes how you're going to proceed. Design your first day.

You can have a student carry the books to the first desk in each row, and then distribute the book cards, and then distribute the contact cards. All this involves movement and time, and is not businesslike. Classroom procedure works so much better if the books and the cards are on each students' desk when they walk in. Kids check the names on the board, find their seats, and the books and the cards are there. The bell rings and you can say something like, "You should have a textbook, a book card and a contact card on your desk. If you don't have a book, raise your hand. If you don't have a contact cards, raise your hand.". Don't say, "Let me know." They'll let you know in ways you never thought of. Have extra cards in your hand to distribute if needed. Don't waste time by going back to the desk to get them. When you're

They'll let you know in ways you never thought of.

ready to collect the cards, have students pass them forward by placing the completed book card on top of the one they receive. If they are sitting alphabetically, the cards are alphabetized when you get them

Student contact card should contain a student's name, address, parents' name, home phone, work number, and last year's teacher's name. This will give you someone to talk to in the faculty room if you need more information about a kid. I don't bother about last year's mark, because it is irrelevant to this year, but I do ask kids to write down what they'd like to see covered, what they enjoy reading, and what problems in the subject they would like help with. Collect the cards the same way and, presto, they are alphabetized. After reviewing these cards, I keep them in the desk. I'm a slow learner. As I get to know my students better, I keep going over the cards. I try to understand the subtext of what they said, rather than just what they said.

Keep rules simple, straight forward, and enforceable in an easy manner.

At this point you've accomplished 1 to 4 on the list, and it's probably taken about fifteen minutes. The next thing to do is deal with class rules. It is best if there are general school rules. The more the institution intercedes to help in classroom management the better, but it seldom happens. Teachers usually are left to find their own way, and learn the principal's policy on things the hard way.

Keep rules simple, straight forward, and enforceable in an easy manner. Over time, you will find what works for you and will be able to modify your rules and regulations

accordingly. These rules will probably deal with lateness, missing homework, make-ups, if any, classroom behavior, passes, and similar items.. I allow kids to make up tests to a 65, even if they failed it, but only early in the morning. In my school, that's six forty- five. Since I'm dealing with seniors, that's not a major problem for them, but if you are teaching younger students, you'll need to make different arrangements. I'll give a kid a second, third or fourth chance, but the kid has to make an effort.

It's a good idea to have students sign the rules and regulations and to have the responsible adult sign them, also. I usually collect them the second day of school with everyone's signature on them Yes, I know kids can forge signatures, but they seldom do the first day of school. This way, everybody knows what the rules are, and you avoid the common student complaint, "I didn't know I had to do that." Be sure to read through the rules, explain them to the kids, and allow a few minutes for comments and questions. If you have been efficient, you still have time for a small lesson By the way, be sure to know to the second, the time the period ends on the clock in your room. That is the one kids key to, not the watch on your wrist.

Beginning work the first day of school is essential.

Beginning work the first day of school is essential. Along with your lesson, you want to provide a written homework assignment. Collect homework the next day, mark it and return it the following day. It sends the message that summer is over, that you're serious about what you are

doing, and they have to be serious, also. Give your first quiz as soon as you can, and get the marks back immediately Quizzes and tests are instructional devices, and much of the benefit is lost if the papers are returned two weeks later.

I require students to keep a notebook for my class. I want them to be able to leave the notebook because I check and mark them. I'm formal about notebooks, number the entries, and have different sections that apply to the subject, even with seniors. There have been some very good students who have kept terrible notebooks, and poor students who have kept excellent ones, but, by and large, good notebooks and good students tend to go together. It makes sense. People learn by repetition, by knowing where to find stuff, by being able to review. It's too much to expect students to keep an entire set of notes in their heads.

The management techniques that work the first day, work all year. But on the first day of class you seldom have to deal with the no paper, no pen, I need a pass syndrome. These annoyances are minor, but unless controlled, they can destroy classroom management.

It always seems to me to be silly and counterproductive to have the beginning of a class delayed or ruined because a kid doesn't have a pencil or paper.

It always seems to me to be silly and counterproductive to have the beginning of a class delayed or ruined because a kid doesn't have a pencil or paper. I always keep a couple of reams of paper in the bottom left hand desk drawer. If you need paper, take it, but before class starts. When the bell rings, I want to be able to begin. Pencils are available, take one but leave collateral. I usually get

cigarettes, car keys, lighters, lunches. I don't accept money, jewelry, or personal things as collateral. Pick up your collateral when you return the pencil at the end of the period. If you need it to write with for the rest of the day, you can have it, it's a present. Perfect system? No, I lose pencils, but it is better than, "If you don't bring paper, pens etc., I'll... " These lectures waste time, don't accomplish much, and kids turn them off because they've listened to them for years. In any event threats are useless, no one pays attention to them, including the teacher who makes them. Kids are smart enough to know that.

You don't want to wait for the bell to ring for them to begin.

Of course, you may be one of those fortunate teachers who works in a district where kids always have their pens and books, but I doubt it. I also keep a few extra textbooks in my desk. If a kid doesn't have a book, he can borrow one if he leaves collateral. There is a penalty for not bringing a book, and the kid pays the penalty, but it's never made any sense to me to have a kid in the room without a book. It's just too easy to get into trouble. And giving a student a pass to a locker to get a book is not an option.

Again, these exchanges take place before class. Kids shouldn't make a habit of not being prepared. If they do, that is a different story, and that needs to be addressed. Privately. Outside of class. But for the occasional offender, it is wiser and easier to help out, than to delay the start of class. Often I'll stand by the classroom door. That way I can monitor the hall too, and check books as kids walk in. Students know it

and just won't walk in without a book. There are assignments and instructions on the board as they enter the room, and they are expected to begin work immediately. You don't want to wait for the bell to ring for them to begin. This is also part of good management.

One last word, passes. You will be giving a brilliant lesson, hands will be up, and you call on one kid because you think you see something in that kid's eyes you've never seen before, sure you'll get a brilliant answer, only to hear, "Can I go to the bathroom?" I want to teach and so do you, neither of us want to play games. Signed passes are on the desk. If you need one, take it, leave the pass on the desk when you return, I'll bundle it in with the homework, and check it off in my mark book. If a pattern develops, we'll talk about it. But it seldom does. Actually, kids take very few passes this way.

These are management concerns. When problems appear, and they appear in all classrooms, you need to design ways around them that work for you, and that do not interfere with teaching and the flow of ideas. These seemingly minor interferences get in the way of class flow, and need to be mitigated.

If a pattern develops, we'll talk about it. But it seldom does. Actually, kids take very few passes this way.

You can argue that a student should be prepared at all times, and, of course, you're right, but my guess is that when you and I were high school students, occasionally we showed up unprepared, too. If a kids shows up unprepared five times a year, and there are thirty kids in a class, that's 150 unpreparedes a year, almost once a period. I refuse to waste

good instructional time solving non-instructional problems. It makes more sense to design procedures around these problems, to avoid confrontation, to get class started on time and to keep it flowing without interruption.

To help classroom flow while teachers cope with administrative details, some educational texts recommend "sponge activities"- activities designed to soak up student time while the teacher is engaged in an administrative task. The problem with these activities is that they soak up instructional time. Having homework assignments on the board that students can copy while the teacher takes the role seems to make sense, but taking attendance, recording it in your mark book, and the ever expanding computer sheet, takes two to three minutes, or five to seven and a half percent of a forty minute period. If it takes kids thirty seconds to write the homework assignment, you have built in a two minute problem for yourself. You could have different kinds of sponge activities, but not every lesson can start this way, and attendance needs to be taken every day. A sponge activity designed primarily to use time, creates a transitional problem when you want to get into the lesson. It is simply not well thought out.

A sponge activity designed primarily to use time, creates a transitional problem when you want to get into the lesson. It is simply not well thought out.

How can you get around this? Try to train kids to record homework assignments before the bell rings, and start teaching immediately. You can record the names of absent students during the period, and you've avoided dead time at the start of the period. From a management standpoint, a

teacher is better off giving up instructional time at the end of the period than at the beginning. Starting class on time is that important.

In a similar light, some texts advise teachers to return graded papers folded and personally to protect privacy. A pleasant concept, but not one designed by a classroom practitioner. If you have thirty students and it takes eight seconds per paper to return them, you've used ten percent of your period and accomplished nothing.

Kids have a pretty good idea how they did on a test,

Kids have a pretty good idea how they did on a test, and they share marks. If you're very concerned about a student's reacting poorly to a mark, you can leave that paper face down on the student's desk before class with very comforting words on it, which is more personal anyway.

Classroom Discipline and the Critter in Front of You

"That son-of-a-bitch didn't come home last night. He spent the night with his girlfriend." A line from a soap opera? It was after school and a student was talking about her father.

"How's mother?" I asked.

"Well, she does what she can, and she's always smiling, but I hear her cry at night. But, it's worse for my brother. My mom can't control him, and he's staying out nights, too." We talked, and she brightened. From her class performance, I would never guess she was under strain, but she was missing some homework. "I'll make up the homework," she said as she left.

In early November, another kid started showing up period eight, my prep period. Last time I visited the faculty room regularly, the Yankees were perennial World Series winners. We talked, and she marked short answer tests, and I waited. Finally, a few days before Thanksgiving, she walked in and said, "I'm pissed."

"What's the matter?"

"I hate Thanksgiving," she said, "My mother walked out the day after Thanksgiving two years ago. It's the Last Supper."

"I hate Thanksgiving," she said, "My mother walked out the day after Thanksgiving two years ago. It's the Last Supper."

Or I think about the girl who attempted suicide, but didn't really mean it. "I just wanted to tell them they were killing me," she said.

Are these stories collected over thirty-eight years? No, just stories from the last few months. There are so many others. The independent student who lived with her boyfriend and became unglued one day, and wound up in a psychiatric hospital. The small-time drug pusher who tried to hold out on his boss, and was dropped off at the emergency room. What am I trying to say? That the critters in front of you are complex and naive, often talented and able, and just as often confused, and as unknown to themselves as to you. They need somebody to care about them. More, they need somebody to teach them. Life is tough, and you can't make it over, but you can insist that they learn. You can insist that knowing stuff is as important to them as is food, and in some ways more necessary. It is probably the only way they can change their lives.

What's the matter with us? We do research and decide the school age population has changed. We have more and different kinds of kids in school. We shake our heads and blame our problems on the disintegration of the family, on society, on politicians. We politely cite a million reasons why the job can't be done. Sure, there are problems. If problems were money, we'd all be rich. But problems can be overcome, the critters in front of you are your students, and you're their teacher. Maybe that's all that has to be said.

If problems were money, we'd all be rich. But problems can be overcome, the critters in front of you are your students, and you're their teacher. Maybe that's all that has to be said.

But it's not all one sided. Teachers have a difficult job, but there are plenty of rewards. There's the man who showed up a couple of months ago, who, "...happened to be in the neighborhood. You won't remember me," he said, "but you taught me in eighth grade thirty years ago, and I just wanted to say, hello." There are kids who come back after graduation and stay in touch, and it's always great to see them and hear how they're doing. And the girl who walked into class a few weeks ago, grinning from ear to ear.

"Guess what?" she said.

"What?" I asked.

"You taught my grandmother!"

How does a teacher handle this panorama of humanness in a classroom? With respect, of course, and with the belief that what you're teaching is important for students to know. Classroom control is not a single skill, but a corollary to good management and good lesson planning. Teachers who combine these skills in a human way seldom have serious classroom difficulties because management skills cut off major problems before they begin, and the process of teaching and learning cut off the minor ones. Classrooms with sound teaching and learning are too busy for serious discipline problems to develop, and the critter in front of you will respond to that.

"You taught my grandmother!"

Student Behavior

The specter of a class out of control haunts more beginning teachers than concerns about subject knowledge. Yet, unlike most ghosts, it can be easily exorcised. Class control is not a single entity, but a combination of professional skills and personality: an integration of what we know about kids and group dynamics and your perceptions, management skills, and subject knowledge. The first part of that combination, student behavior, is not a great mystery. Teachers know about students not only from course work and from observations, but also from personal knowledge. We were all students once; we still are. We probably did not react differently to our teachers than students react to us. What do students want? They want what we all want.

What do students want? They want what we all want.

We want to be appreciated, do well, succeed, and avoid failure. We enjoy associating with friendly, competent people. That students prefer teachers who are friendly, surprises no one. But a teacher's friendliness is an offshoot of personality. For teachers deliberately to try to become the students' friend is a mistake. Student have plenty of friends. It is simply not possible for a teacher to be a friend in the true sense of the word. That should be obvious. Being friends allows teenage concerns to dominate the environment. Your students need more than friendship from you. They need to learn, and they need you to teach. From you, they need to get information and knowledge and the opportunity to use that

information and knowledge to solve problems, to integrate what they learn into their lives.

The best teaching, as noted before, the most successful teaching, happens in a structured, open environment, where the teacher is friendly and caring. Students need to know the rules, and the rules need to be consistent. If a teacher could pick only one quality, that quality should be consistency. So much changes in a student's life. Often neither family nor friendships are stable. How nice to meet someone whose words you can take to the emotional bank.

The best teaching,... the most successful teaching, happens in a structured, open environment...

A teacher's friendliness and caring can be displayed in many ways: the use of nicknames, cutting a little slack in unimportant things, honest concern for student problems, empowering students, would you rather do A or B?, - in general a real concern for the needs of students. Teachers should realize problems which seem insignificant in the adult world may be devastating to a student. Just acknowledging the existence of a problem can help students defuse it and focus on work. "I see what you mean, Billy, I don't have an answer to that right now. Let me think about it, maybe I can suggest a solution. Drop by at the end of the day, and we can talk about it."

How nice to meet someone whose words you can take to the emotional bank.

Sometimes, teachers are under great pressure to teach subject matter, and we forget what we are about. We forget we are teaching subject matter to people. And people have problems, occasionally overwhelming problems. To

complicate things, teachers don't only deal with one student, we deal with groups of students in a common enterprise and a group dynamic develops. Dealing with individual students and with that group dynamic requires thought. Yet it's not an impossible task. There are plenty of kids, maybe the majority of them, who are well balanced. Who have a sense of purpose and direction, and who aren't frightened by the future. Still, a teacher needs to realize there are emotional undercurrents that can surface at anytime.

Each class has its own chemistry. Kids react to you and to each other, and you to them. Since there are different players in each class, the pot boils a little differently each period. Billy is Billy, but he acts differently in period one from period two because the players are different. We need to understand that.

Each class has to come together and form its own cohesion. When that happens in a positive way, the environment becomes friendly, relaxed, a group of students going about the task of learning. On the other side of the coin, when the cohesion is negative, not a coalescing of teacher and students in a common task, but a coalescing of students against teacher, the results are obvious.

It is difficult to know why this failure occurs, at least it is difficult to pin it down with mathematical precision, but, usually, it's due to the teacher's failure to structure the environment in a positive way, and a lack of concern for the needs of students. In a society that has little structure,

In a society that has little structure, especially for young people, the rules that act as guidelines in your class are more than management tools. They are often safety nets.

especially for young people, the rules that act as guidelines in your class are more than management tools. They are often safety nets. I've had kids tell me they wouldn't come to school today, except they didn't want to miss class a or b. That's student talk, of course, but we can learn things from listening to student talk. What kind of rooms are classes a or b? Usually they are friendly, open and within the openness highly structured. Kids need to know where the limits are.

Limits and a concern for students is what class control is all about. Kids do want to learn and if your room is structured in a way that promotes learning, many or your control problems disappear. Kids are also human and will take the easy way out if allowed to. Perhaps there is a truism about class control, if it is easier for kids to behave than not to, they will behave. If it's easier not to behave, well, you can figure that out, too.

What makes it easier for kids to behave? First, confidence. You need to believe in yourself as a teacher. Good teachers seem to have a sense of responsibility They expect students to share that responsibility. In these classrooms there is an implied contract. Teachers hold up their end of the agreement by providing an environment where learning can occur, and students hold up their end of the classroom contract by working.. This is critical for control. Students, busy working and learning, and developing a sense of success, have little need to disrupt class. If on the other hand, students cannot succeed, cannot get a sense of

You need to believe in yourself as a teacher.

accomplishment, it is reasonable to expect them to while away the time thinking of ways to get into trouble and to annoy you. The missing ingredient in class control is usually a lack of real accomplishment. A teacher can justify saying, "Let Billy do the work, let Suzy study. I've presented the material now it's up to them." You are right- in a perfect world- but, the world gets a little less perfect each day.

When we read The Metamorphosis, and discuss the struggle between Gregor and his father, I've seen tears in the eyes of very tough kids. I had a boy walk out and sit on the floor in the hall and bury his heads in his hands. It gets that close to home. The kid walked out of class, do I write a referral? Or do I metaphorically sit next to him and wait until he puts it together? These kids need to realize they have value as human beings, that they have the ability to succeed, and that, if they work, they can succeed.

The movement in American education towards self-esteem, well intentioned as it is, is often, in practice, counterproductive. Self esteem is measured by setting guidelines for yourself and meeting them. Sometimes you succeed, and sometimes you fail, but self esteem is in meeting the challenge. Give a kid an "A" for "D" work, and he'll take the mark, but he won't respect you, and what's worse is you've taught him not to respect himself, by saying to him, you can't do it, I'll have to give you the mark.

Once I had the same class of fifteen or so boys for three years- grades 7, 8, and 9. No one else wanted them, and

The movement in American education towards self-esteem, well intentioned as it is, is often in practice, counterproductive.

I was considered a hero in the faculty room because I kept them out of the mainstream. In grade seven, four of them did not have a measurable reading level. The highest reading level was grade four. It was the most open, most structured classroom, I've ever run. When they went on to the high school, eight of them were grade level readers, two were above grade level and the lowest reading level was grade seven. Great teacher? Hardly. I made mistakes every day. But they were great students. I don't think it would have worked so well if I had inflated their marks, but I did try to provide an atmosphere where they could succeed. They did the rest.

Perhaps the best way to develop class control is to decide on the four or five major rules that are most important to you. Each teacher has his or her set of priorities, but these priorities, whatever they are, are the ones that need to be strictly enforced. These are the rules your students know can't be violated with impunity. Design these rules to facilitate your management concerns. When things aren't working well in your classroom, and from time to time that happens to all of us, figure out exactly what's not working and why, analyze the problem, understand it before you act. Is something interfering with the flow of work? Are you creating transition problems? Homework not being done? Are you marking it in some way? Are your students noisy? Are you demanding attention? Not studying for quizzes? Are you marking and returning them quickly enough? Often you

Perhaps the best way to develop class control is to decide on the four or five major rules that are most important to you.

can solve your problems by changing your behavior, or by establishing rules to eliminate it. As stated before, control and management practices work best when they cut off problems before they happen. Reactive control and management is sometimes necessary, but if that is what primarily happens in your classroom, then as a teacher you are behind the learning curve.

Easy Ways to Establish Class Control

To me the most important control and management problem is starting class on time every day. It is my Number One rule. This is as true as anything I know. Teachers who start their classes on time, seldom have control problems, and teachers who never start on time, always have trouble. Perhaps that is because what a teacher does to start class on time is a template for good management and control practices. These teachers are organized, and do not allow the usual delaying tactics to interfere with the start of instruction. Consider some of the reasons class does not start on time:

I allow nobody, not even God, to hang out by my door.

A student starts to talk to you thirty seconds before the bell rings. The bell rings, and you're engaged with one student, what happens to the other twenty-nine students?

Or, perhaps you allow students to "hang out" by your door. They arrive early, stop at the door to chat with you or friends, or they drop their books at their seat and return to

the door. Check out the boys, check out the girls, bum a cigarette. **Steadfast rule**: I allow nobody, not even God, to hang out by my door. Teachers are known for their quirks- what is important to them, what is not important to them. What's important to me is getting class started on time, and kids know that. I believe it's the key to classroom management and control, at least for me. No one hangs out by the door, students are expected to be in their seats and working when the bell rings, not just in the room. If they aren't doing that, their mark suffers. Kids know that. If there is a problem, I'll listen - at the end of class, at the end of the day, the next morning. Kids know that, too. But right now, class starts on time. Why? Because lateness has the potential to interrupt a class. It doesn't matter if it's ten seconds, thirty seconds, or ten minutes. Billy is late. What to do?

... lateness has the potential to interrupt a class. It doesn't matter if it's ten seconds, thirty seconds, or ten minutes.

I remove points from the student's mark. They can be earned back by serving detention the next morning. I'm amazed at how many kids show up for that seven o'clock detention. When they do, I always send down for bagels and coffee, and it gets to be a general get to know you session, sometimes the highlight of the day. Seven A.M. you're serving detention and you'd rather be elsewhere, but it doesn't mean we can't be friendly.

Years ago, I remember being observed by a new department head. Twelfth grade, low-level tough kids. I got very little feedback from him. All he wanted to do was write about the beginning of class. Class started before the bell, all

students in their seats working, no one came in late. "How did you do that?", he wanted to know. "Do what?" "Start the class like that." "Like what?" It was beginning to sound like a Wodehouse novel- his playing Bertie to my Jeeves. "But," I told him, "classes are supposed to start like that." "Yeah", he said, "but they don't. How did you do it?" Just tell your students what you want, and enforce it firmly and gently. One of my favorite classroom expressions is: "This isn't personal, this is business." Billy's late, Billy knows the rules, Billy pays the price, and Billy knows it's business, it ain't personal.

Homework and projects have to be done.

Rules are developed to avoid the things you can't allow to happen in your classroom. They will vary from room to room For me, in addition to class starting on time, students must have text books and notebooks. I keep a few extra textbooks in the room, but there is a price to be paid if the student shows up without a textbook. I never allow heads on desks. This probably happens more in upper grades than lower grades, where kids can work as many as thirty hours in addition to going to school. I'm not unsympathetic to the problem, but if I'm ready to work, students have to be ready to work, too. Homework and projects have to be done. These are my rules, your rules may well be different. It is not what the rules are that's important, but that there are rules, and the rules are well known, and that those rules are enforced in a reasonably and friendly manner, and they go hand in hand with your management concerns.

Major Stuff

The worst thing that can happen to you as a teacher is for your structure to break down and lose control of your class. When that happens the relationship between teacher and students breaks down, too. Divided into enemy camps, no learning occurs. If this happens, don't get discouraged. It happens to almost every beginning teacher. You expect students to learn from mistakes, learn from yours. Examine your practices carefully. Talk to colleagues, find out what works for them. Devise rules (control) and procedures (management) to eliminate problems at the source.

Kids are not different from the rest of us.

Since students' reactions are no different from teachers' reactions, there are certain kinds of discipline practices you don't want to indulge in. Kids are not different from the rest of us. If you tickle, them they laugh. If you prick, then they bleed. If you humiliate them, they retaliate. If you respect them? A teacher needs to control behavior without embarrassing, without harming, without destroying. Don't back students into a corner, you need to leave them an out. Don't destroy a student's pride. You need cooperation, you don't need a fight. Nor can you teach or motivate people who don't respect you. You can be tough, but you can't be vindictive. Your best bet is being efficient, competent, and let the rules do the work for you.

Many textbooks especially ones that advocate aggressive management techniques advise teachers to challenge students if necessary. Look them right in the eye and make if very clear their behavior is unacceptable. This is not a bad idea, and I'm sure it works. But it's not my style. If I need to confront a kid in January, I always think there could have been something I should have done differently in September or October. By January, I don't want to be bothered with control problems. By then all I want to do is clear my throat a couple of times a month. September or October gives you plenty of time to establish your rules and your procedures. If you think them out carefully, you probably don't need more than a few days. Kids are, for the most part, willing to give you a break. It is my observation that classes seldom break down before November. The oldest member in the faculty room always advises beginning teachers never to smile till January. It's a good rule. Even an experienced teacher finds it difficult to tighten up, and you can always ease up.

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Minor Stuff

I deal with minor problems, talking, passing notes, etc., on an ad hoc basis. Students are human. Humans communicate. Such behavior obviously distracts and has to be controlled. You job is to control it unobtrusively. Certainly, you don't want to be more disruptive than the behavior you want to control. Sometimes English teachers complain in one breath that they can't get students to write, and in the next breath, that the students are always passing notes. It's easier and less distracting to walk over and pick up the note. Don't read it. It's not written to you. Leave it on the teachèr desk, and kids can pick it up when they leave. You can't stop every kind of student activity, and you really don't want to. You want to control those things which interfere with instruction. Otherwise, you become the cop and they become the bad guys. You start playing a game of "I got ya, no you don't". While this nonsense goes on, no learning goes on. Often all you have to do is make it clear the behavior is not acceptable.

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Calling home

Textbooks often suggest teachers call home when a student is a disciplinary problem. I have no problem calling home when one of my students is doing really well, letting people know it. I don't have a problem calling home to let the responsible adult know a student is failing, but in that case I like to have options for the responsible adult so my student

has the opportunity to make up deficiencies. I don't like to call home for discipline reasons. I did once when I was a lot more naive than I am now, and the kid showed up the next day with a black eye and a broken nose. Papa apparently had a quick trigger. I was a hero in the faculty room, but it never sat well with me. Calling home for disciplinary reasons may work better in a middle school or junior high school situation where the responsible adult presumably has more control over the student. It may work at least for a few days. However, the response from a parent of a high school student often is, I can't do anything with him/her either. I just think it is wrong of me to have to make the responsible adult say that. It is my classroom, and my students' classroom, and if I can't keep control or discipline in it, the responsible adult cannot do it for me either.

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Insubordinate behavior

Insubordinate behavior cannot be accepted. Often this behavior has nothing to do with you, but boils over from some other cause; yet you cannot allow your class to be destroyed. You have an responsibility to teach the rest of your students, and you have an obligation to your colleagues. If you accept improper behavior, it will spill over into other classrooms. Each school has its procedures for dealing with this. Follow them to the letter.

One More Word

When I started teaching, some well-meaning person who had probably just been to a seminar wrote the following multiple choice question on the blackboard in the faculty room:

Student relations

a) Businesslike

b) Efficient

c) Friendly

d) Compassionate

e) All of the Above

Nothing else went up on that board all year. Choose E, of course, but aim for A & B in September, C in January, and D by April. It's not bad advice.

Lesson Plans

Management techniques, control strategies, and classroom dynamics are the background of your professional practices. They are the "little things" that allow you to teach effectively. But the real measure of your teaching is the effectiveness of your lessons and lesson planning.

What makes one lesson more effective than another? Probably organization. Organization remains the most important single contributor to the effectiveness of your lessons, especially organization around the way students learn. Consider how difficult it is to learn new material, and to abstract concepts from it, if the presentation is not organized. The learner must not only deal with the material, but provide the intellectual organization needed to understand it. The more organized your lesson, the more intellectual framework you provide, the easier it becomes for your student to learn. What is the best way to organize a lesson? By the way students learn.

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Let's consider a simple theoretical base of how students learn.

a) Students construct understanding from their own experience. To get to the unknown, students travel through the known. We may have different perceptions, and different

backgrounds, but we perceive with and share the same human nature. We use what we know to expand our understanding of what we do not know.

b) Yet we all learn differently. We all have different strengths and weaknesses. Consequently the more involved the learner is, the more modalities involved, the faster the student is likely to learn and the more likely he/she is to remember. We remember about 17% of what we hear, and about 75% of what we hear, see, write, and experience.

c) Students remember what is repeated. Repetition sticks.

They begin to draw up structure from their own experience to deal with your lesson plan, of at least to think about it. In other words their minds are active, and you haven't said anything yet.

Recall chapter one. One teacher had material on the board as kids walked in This strategy was part of his lesson, part of his lesson plan, and part of his management techniques- they go hand in hand. Having stuff on the board- directions, information, material,-an agenda- not only gives kids something to do as they walk in, but also starts them thinking about the lesson to come. They begin to draw up structure from their own experience to deal with your lesson plan, of at least to think about it. Their minds are active, and you haven't said anything. Lesson plans are not a passive

thing to do, rather they are an active means of teaching, and an active means of learning. Students have an absolute human need to learn. Your agenda and theirs is the same. Sure, you may have to get kids to do what they don't want to do, but that tells us something about human nature, it doesn't tell us anything about the learning process.

Students are sometimes confused by our artificial approach to knowledge. They don't see the world as subjects, but as a continuum. Schools divide knowledge into subjects to study them, but they are combined and inter-related in the learner. One of the more interesting movements in education is revived interest in interdisciplinary teaching, which breaks down the artificial barriers between subjects. Even planning techniques as simple as teaching related material in different subjects at the same time helps. For example, teaching slavery in social studies and reading *Huck Finn* in English lets students understand the human consequences of historical facts.

Kids are sometimes confused by our artificial approach to knowledge.

But, if students have a need to know, and if they see the world as a continuum, why are they turned off by school? Is it because learning isn't relevant? In a modern society what could be more relevant than math and science? Yet, math and science teachers tell us kids are turned off in these classes, too. Teachers hear kids say, "Why do I have to know this stuff?" What they really are asking is, why do I have to know this stuff if it can't make a difference in my life? Part of this problem is the school's fault. We've victimized

ourselves. We've taught students that all opinions have equal value. Students respond to this by thinking if nothing is more important than anything else, if everything has the same importance or lack of importance, why should I bother to learn? The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. We need to insist to our students that knowledge has validity and meaning, that learning is important to them.

We must act that way, and teach that way. Else what's a school for? We need to convey to our students that knowing stuff is important to them now as well as in the future, that knowing changes perceptions, and is the key to their futures. For our students to believe learning is valuable to them and to believe in us as teachers they need to see what we teach and how we teach, our lessons, as part of a meaningful whole which they can examine both deductively and inductively, paralleling an exploration of reality. Our students should see our lessons as proceeding from the previous one and opening the way to the next. Each lesson should have a clearly understood purpose, objective, and follow up. If a teacher doesn't care enough to follow up on a lesson, why should a student?

If a teacher doesn't care enough to follow up on a lesson, why should a student?

Most teachers use a lesson plan book to write plans, and they are acceptable for veteran teachers who use these plan books as an outline, and fill in from their experience, but you, as a beginning teacher, need to write more detailed plans and need carefully to consider the success of each lesson plan, evaluating its effectiveness as soon as possible, and recording

your evaluation. Be completely honest with yourself. Try using a checklist, at least for a while. Did class start on time? Was homework done? Were transitions smooth? Was the class under control? Was the purpose of your lesson clear? Did you include summaries? Was there participation? If you are not satisfied with the answers, ask yourself what you needed to do with that class to succeed. Keep these evaluations and compare them, especially when giving similar lessons. Patterns will develop over time. You will begin to know what works for you, and you'll see your strengths and your weaknesses.

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Parts of a lesson plan.

Lesson plan nomenclature changes. What was once an aim or purpose, is now an instructional objective. This change is normal. Over time we refine our practices. But whatever the nomenclature, lesson plans have, by necessity, the same psychological and instructional map. That is, they are the means to get information to students and to show students how that information can be used to solve problems. All teaching involves obvious steps: what to teach, how to teach it for maximum understanding, how to evaluate the effectiveness of your teaching, and how students can use the information taught.

The first decision in any lesson is what you are going to teach, the information you need to convey to your kids. The rest of the lesson plan is how best to teach to the

students in front of you, to tie your plan to prior knowledge and to link it to future learning.

As teachers we need to capitalize on the things we know work for us. We know that students learn differently, so teaching to as many strengths as possible makes sense. That way no one is left out. I like students to see it, hear it, speak it, work with it, write it, think about it. The more involvement, the better.

If we expect our students to abstract and generalize from facts, they need to be well grounded in those facts. I use reviews, sometimes very brief ones, because if I want material kept in focus, I need to repeat it. To get students immersed in material, I try to teach to all strengths in each class. Within the limits of management and control concerns, I like to get everyone involved every day. I use lectures, worksheets, story drama, journal writing, summary sheet, discussion, projects, essays, art work, lots of homework; in short, everything I can think of to get student involvement.

If we expect our students to abstract and generalize from facts, they need to be well grounded in those facts.

When students walk in, my lesson plan is on the board, at least in outline form. Often I'll ask them to look at the board and we will read the outline. This helps them focus on the agenda for the day. The general concept is on the top. Under that, the instructional objective, and the means or steps of getting there. I also include the homework assignment and the date This information stops that very innocent, "What's today's date?" question. Corollary to this, reading the plan doesn't begin until everyone is attentive. In other words do

not let kids think you will teach if they are not attending because if that happens, you wind up talking to yourself.

Along with the plans, sometimes there are directions. For example, Pick up story grammar sheet, due 11:40. I used to write due in ten minutes, but I find that using an actual time works better. Sometimes I have handouts for them on their desks, sometimes I require them to pick up the material. Picking up or having material on the desk, varies the routine slightly. If there is a lot of material to be distributed, I'll try to have it on their desks when they come in. This cuts down on lost class time, makes transitions smoother, and keeps interruptions to a minimum. Slight variations in routine require kids to engage with the material on the board when they walk in and that helps keep interest.

Many experienced teachers find it helpful to keep a chart of events on the board. Mine might look like this: *Inferno* test 3/12, "Abandon Hope, etc." notebooks due 3/15. projects due 3/17. make-up test 6:45 A.M. 3/20. The information is there. Kids look for it, and that cuts down on classroom interruptions.

No matter what lesson plan nomenclature a school uses, lesson summaries, both at the middle and at end of each lesson, are useful. Used skillfully, they become part of your instructional technique, allowing students who may be thinking about last night's phone call or basketball game the opportunity to catch up, and participate in the rest of the lesson. They're useful in other ways, too. Students are

No matter what lesson plan nomenclature a school uses, summaries, both at the middle and at end of each lesson, are useful.

accustomed to eleven minute TV segments and then a commercial, instead of attending for forty minutes, By breaking a lesson into parts and still keeping its continuity, teachers can also keep students' attention. In a sense it's a break and an opportunity to refocus, it groups learning, and the lesson plan is still a cohesive whole. When you ask kids to provide the summary, they are more attentive, because they know that they may be called on . What are the major points we just focused on...Suzy? What's the purpose, what holds these concepts together....Billy?

Lessons that build from each other, that begin by going back to prior knowledge and lead on to future learning, especially if I can vary activities, work best for me. I found it helpful to take time out occasionally to go back to works and characters previously studied to compare pieces, and to make generalizations. This way the developmental work of the entire year can stay in focus.

The developmental work I'm talking about is the need to connect things, to show learning has meaning. Given the opportunity ordinary students do this very well. Hamlet is a problem play. The motivations of some of the characters aren't clear, the plot doesn't fit together as well as we'd like, and it's great fun to develop scenarios to make them fit. We speculate that Ophelia is pregnant, and since we use Zefferelli's movie with Mel Gibson he seems to go in that direction, too, and there is enough internal evidence to support this view..

The developmental work I'm talking about is the need to connect things, t show learning has meaning.

But one student took it a step further. If Ophelia's pregnant and if the father is Claudius, not Hamlet, a lot of the problems of the play fall into place. Hamlet's hatred of women, his saying to Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery," his calling Polonius a fishmonger, a term that also mean a pimp--all of these things now make sense. Polonius, himself, comes into sharper focus. Is the man who gives his son excellent advice as foolish as he seems, or is he, like Hamlet, acting? The ease with which Ophelia breaks with Hamlet, Gertrude's desire to please Claudius because she has a younger rival, these incidents now have a rationale.

I'm not sure I buy all of it, but it is a tentative answer that solves some of the plays problems, and I've never seen it in the literature. It's an example of a very "ordinary" student, using facts and some very interesting thinking to solve problems, which is what schooling is all about.

The curriculum won't change, at leas not overnight. And your kids won't change. The only flex you have is in your plans and your methods.

Nothing is more critical in your teaching than your lesson plans. The curriculum won't change, at least not overnight, and your kids won't change. The only flex you have is in your plans and your methods. Give your plans a reality check. Ask yourself, will this work in period three tomorrow? If not, what do you have to do to make it work? How can you adjust your methods to make your students as important a factor in your planning as your curriculum?

Sometimes you may have to adjust the material. Decide what is important for your students to know. You may have taken a graduate seminar at Yale in Goethe's Faust,

Part One, pulled an A and published a paper, but here you are teaching it to high school seniors. Admit it; not all great literature is great on every page, some of it doesn't translate well; some of it needs to be explained in modern terms; some of it can be summarized. You have five weeks. Should you read all of Faust, Part One, examining every metaphor? I doubt they do that at Yale, unless the psychology department wants to measure brain overload. Or, should you read it for the story line, and deal with the major metaphors, leaving two weeks to read seven or eight Cantos from Dante's Inferno? I opt for the second, but with a caveat. I won't take shortcuts that destroy the integrity of the material.

Of course, you need to know- really know- the piece you want to teach...

I think the key to selecting pieces to read is to ask yourself a simple question, why should my students read this? Is it important to them? Will it help them grow? Will they have a better understanding of themselves and the world? Does the theme relate to other pieces? When you are comfortable with the answers, you can begin to plan your lessons.

Of course, you need to know- really know- the piece you want to teach, and that seems more difficult than it actually is. Recently a student teacher shied away from some of the literature.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I don't know the piece well enough," she said.

We went into the library and the research librarian took us through the explicators, the reference books and the 800 section. The student teacher became expert quickly enough. It reminded me a little Harry Truman's saying, "The only thing new is the history you haven't learned." It's all there. All the information you need to be an expert is available: the summaries, analysis, background, criticism, everything, especially today with easy internet access. And often kids can put stuff together for you better than you can. Once, when reviewing for a final that included both Faust and the Inferno, I said without thinking too much about it that Gretchen got herself pregnant. I was told by one girl, very icily, "Gretchen did not get herself pregnant. She became pregnant because Faust could not get around Dante's She-Wolf of Incontinence." Ah, take the cash, and let the credit go.

"Gretchen did not get herself pregnant. She became pregnant because Faust could not get around Dante's She-Wolf of Incontinence."

Markbooks

Managing Your Time- Markbooks and Marking Policy

Teaching is a time intensive profession, and you need to learn to manage your time. After classroom management, time management is your greatest challenge. As with student behavior, if you don't manage it, time will manage you. A young teacher I worked with for two years summarized the problem in two words. Work smart.

How best to work smart and manage your time? Think about which tasks require most of your time, which you do most slowly, and develop strategies to perform those tasks more quickly. If you spend too much time marking papers, maybe you can design your quizzes differently. Too much time planning? Check the curriculum. Perhaps you can teach similar material to different classes at the same time, at least until you know the material better. This kind of analysis always helps. The period goes by too quickly; the year goes by too quickly. There is never enough time and there is always more to do. How to do more in less time? How to be more productive? You'll deal with these challenges your entire career.

How best to work smart and manage your time?

Some time-savers are obvious. Save stuff: tests, quizzes, assignments,-the bigger your filing cabinet, the more loaded your computer, the better. You don't have to reinvent

the wheel every day. Many teachers never teach anything the same way twice. The same material, sure, but not the same way. If you teach the American Revolution ten times, by necessity, you know more. Your understanding of motivations are sharper, your sense of personalities, richer. We don't teach material the same way because we no longer see it that way. But that doesn't mean we can't borrow from our past. A question from this quiz, two questions from that one, an assignment that worked well- time savers all. We become more productive. Giving a test in a configuration that can be easily marked, arranging due dates for essays or reports before weekends or days off are simple strategies that make paperwork easier.

Most teachers learn to organize instructional strategies, but neglect to organize the simpler chores.

Most teachers learn to organize instructional strategies, but neglect to organize the simpler chores. After planning and grading, teachers spend more time with their markbook than with their families. Yet they don't streamline marking procedures. Your markbook is your friend, and what you put into that friendship determines what you get out of it.

You probably already know markbooks/attendance books are legal documents. They can be and have been subpoenaed. So you need to be accurate and careful.

Familiarize yourself with the markbook you'll be using. A marking quarter is generally ten weeks. The most useful markbooks provide seven or eight spaces for each week. This helps teachers who have a lot of marks. When organizing the markbook, remember you need to provide

space for 40 weeks for each class. There is generally a pool in each faculty room about which first year teachers will have to re-do the markbook because they didn't leave enough room for each class.

By the thirtieth week, students' names and lines no longer easily match. If you list student's names without providing compensating blank spaces, it's not too unusual for student #26 to receive student #27's marks. So you get to the end of the class set and you have an extra paper. Where did you go wrong, paper ten? Paper twenty? Start over? Check them all? Very frustrating 11 p.m. Sunday night. Compensate for exophoria, isophoria, fatigue, diplopia, or the third glass of wine. Skip two or three lines after each row of students. It is easier to record marks, cuts down on errors, and leaves space for the student who enters your class December 15.

Compensate for exophoria, isophoria, fatigue, diplopia, or the third glass of wine.

During the first day of school, you will receive an overload of information about your students. Maybe you can run all that information on Windows '98, but not in the human brain. The school nurse will send you a confidential list of students with medical problems, usually in a sealed envelope. Guidance and Special Ed will give you a list of kids with learning problems. Administration will give you a list of kids with special problems.(usually that means discipline problems). All this is well-intentioned, useful, but almost impossible to deal with day one. Read through this cluster of information to informally note major aberrations and then put it aside. After your markbook is made up, go through the lists

and then **code** the information into the markbook where you will see it often and have it in an emergency. This information is especially useful when you are evaluating student performance. Are there variables you want to consider? If so, you will have them easily available.

The first mark in your markbook for each student is the letter "e", entered That is the date the student started your class. If a student leaves your class before the end of the year, the last day is marked "l", for left. Absences are usually marked with a chevron (<).

Although some teachers use both a markbook and an attendance book, generally it is faster and easier to keep marks and attendance in the same book. This saves coping with another book, and cross-referencing who wasn't in class for a test. You are free to do the work associated with two record books, but you can't create more time. Probably one of the great causes of teacher-burnout is mindless, repetitive chores. If you think about it, you can find ways to be efficient, without doing the same work over and over again.

... was he late enough to run outside, crazy glue the superintendent's car doors shut...

There is no standard mark for lateness, but it is a good idea to develop a system that works for you. Try recording attendance lightly in pencil first, so if a student shows up late, the attendance can be adjusted. It is also a good idea to devise a system to tell you how late Billy was. How late was Billy, Mr. Smith, on March 1st? Well, I don't know, but I marked him late. Well, was he late enough to run outside, crazy glue the superintendent's car doors shut, and

still get to class? Exactly how late was Billy? There are many ways to keep track of lateness. Here's a simple one you might try: Billy is up to ten minutes late, record a small "l" in the top left corner of the appropriate box. If he's eleven to twenty minutes late, record the "l" in the top right corner. Up to thirty minutes, record "l" in bottom left, more than thirty minutes, in the bottom right.

It's June first, and you just lost your markbook. How do you close out the year?

It's June first, and you just lost your markbook. How do you close out the year? How do you do report cards? Markbooks, for some reason, tend, from time to time, to disappear, especially in May and June. Perhaps there is something about a markbook that likes to take an early vacation. Markbooks disappear for two reasons: students are human, and teachers get careless. It is like leaving a hundred dollar bill out in the open. You are disappointed if someone picks it up, but you are not surprised. Obviously you need to protect the book, to put it away, to lock the desk and so on. Losing a markbook is similar to a running back's fumbling on the one yard line. With one side of their brain, your colleagues will be sympathetic, helpful, but with the other side of their brain, they will ask, "God, how could you let that happen?"

If you loose your markbook, relax, just go to the backup. Backup? I didn't computerize it. You could have, but you don't have to. Every week or two, copy the latest segment of the markbook on the copying machine. Get into the habit of doing this on Friday afternoon, before you leave

the building. Leave the copies at home! Make an opportunity to let the kids know you have a backup. "I thought I misplaced my markbook, but I found it, no harm done. I always keep another copy at home." Markbooks seldom take early vacations from teachers who are known to have backup.

While your markbook contains a great deal of important information, its most important use is for recording marks so you can implement your marking policy. What is a marking policy? How do you determine yours? Some schools and departments have developed a marking policy. Obviously, if your school has one, you will follow that system, but more likely, your school or department doesn't have a policy, and you have to establish your own. How to weight a quiz, a test, a major test, an essay? How do I evaluate homework? Class participation? Notebooks, journals, note taking, etc.? The way you answer these questions determines your marking policy. To be fair to your students, your marking policy should be promulgated. Students have a right to know how their performance is being evaluated. One thing that can be said for authentic assessment is that since it is new, teachers and students are feeling their way, and the rules are usually well spelled out. Whatever your assessment strategies, spell out the rules. Your marking policy should be consistent, reasonable, known, and compassionate.

The way you answer these questions determines your marking policy.

I recall a colleague saying something like this: Billy is only a 70 student, If he weren't so lazy he'd be a 90 student. He just doesn't have a sense of values. I agree Billy is a 70 student and he could be a 95 student, but I know he's not lazy. In addition to attending school and taking advanced classes, he works 35 hours a week. He's the oldest male in the household. He does the usual chores- the lawn, the painting - the small repairs, etc. Any money he earns goes to the house, not to himself. He takes care of his younger brother, and worries about Mom who works 40 to 50 hours a week. He does miss homework occasionally, mostly mine, not my colleague's. I think I know why. He suffers the same penalty for missing homework anyone else does, but somehow we've found him enough extra points to keep him going. None of this means Billy should be given an 90 or even a 80; that would be a lack of equity. But if things get more difficult and he slips to a 60, he might still find a 65 in the box in the last column. And a strong college recommendation from me.

In addition to attending school and taking advanced classes, he works 35 hours a week.

But I digress. Let's return to the weighting of marks. As you can see, it is a serious concern. How are the different parts of evaluation mixed to produce a single mark? Instead of averaging all the quizzes and taking 15% of them, all the essays and taking 30% of them, all the tests and taking 25% of them etc. into mathematical infinitude, enter the marks once, twice or three times in your markbook. For example, a quiz is entered once, an essay three times, a test three times

etc. and then all the marks are averaged. It is a fast, reasonable solution.

How can you remember what each mark represents ten weeks later? You can't, unless at the bottom of the column you have noted the topic of the quiz, test, or essay.

I tend to have a lot of marks for a marking period, and for a higher level class- College English, World Literature- I insist all the marks be made up, but for a basic class where absences tend to be higher, and kids work more hours after school, I might accept 32 out of 35 marks, and for kids who have the 35 marks, I'll drop the three lowest marks. Obviously, you can't give away the store, but you have to be realistic and responsive to the needs of the kids you're dealing with.

I insist all the marks be made up.

Why Teach?

A Changing Profession- And how do you pronounce paradigm?*

Times have changed. Thirty-eight years ago a teacher could lecture, assign homework, and reasonably expect enough kids to do it to have something to build from the next day. Today it's all different. It's more difficult, and in a lot of ways more rewarding.

My mentor was very fond of saying that kids have no image of themselves as students until they go to school. Whatever images kids have of themselves are as someone's child, sibling, or peer. Even at the age of five or six, kids cope with their limitations, and in a sense their failures. Schools provide the opportunity to start over.

Schools probably haven't changed quickly enough to accommodate the social changes, social needs and learning styles that society has engendered. Kids accustomed to TV and video games, get their information from thirty second "sound bites," instead of from books, magazines and newspapers. The socialization provided by sitcoms, prolongs adolescence, and discourages adult solutions to problems. Students trying to deal with the real world become more and more confused.

My mentor was very fond of saying that kids have no image of themselves as students until they go to school.

As family structure is weakened, students rely more on friendships than on family. These friendships become extended surrogate families, but they are built on shifting alliances. The break-up of a friendship can be as devastating to a teen as the break-up of a family, isolating him or her from the mainstream.

Under these circumstances schools need to play a more important role in the development of students, providing structure that was once provided by other institutions. In some areas, schools provide the primary medical, dental and nutritional care of students, and teachers become the sole role model for adolescent development. But, schools, being part of the society, can be confused by the same forces that have confused the society as a whole

In this kind of environment, teachers make differences.

In this kind of environment, teachers make differences. A kid once said to me that good teachers change people. "What does that mean?" I asked, not sure where he was going. "Just that, kids are different at the end of the year from the beginning of the year," he said. He's right. Teaching has become that important. We no longer just teach important stuff; we change people by the important stuff we teach. Welcome to a changing profession.

But change is a double-edged sword. The graduate work you are doing at this point in your career will keep you up to date for a few years, but after you become a practicing teacher, unless you take steps to prevent it, you risk being isolated in your classroom, and letting the profession change

around you. Actually teachers have a dual challenge, needing to keep up with the literature in their field and the literature of methodology. In order to keep up, you need to join professional organizations, read the publications, haunt the bookstores, go to conferences, and you need to realize everything new isn't better, nor is it worse. You need to know enough to evaluate the paradigms,* and the newer teaching models you will encounter during your career.

The term model is as overworked in education as "Let's do lunch" is in business. A model is nothing more than a way of doing something. It seems there are always two contending models and you're expected to be an advocate of one or the other, and a newer one on the horizon, waiting to replace one of the older ones, perhaps with just different nomenclature. Each side debates politely, of course, while reputations and money are waiting to be made. But which is better for your students? You are their teacher. They need you to decide.

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Your definition of teaching drives your professional decisions. Is teaching the transmission of knowledge? (a model), a process of problem solving? (a model), or a process to provide success to enhance self-esteem?(a model), or is it something else? Perhaps a process where teachers transmit

knowledge to students, who then use it to solve problems, obtaining success which improves self-esteem.

The proponents of a model tend to see the world as an either/or situation. Consider the great debate in reading. One way or another, it has been going on for a hundred years. Does Johnny learn to read best by instruction in phonics (a model), or by whole word method (a model), or by the new contender, whole language (a model)? A lot of kids have learned to read from each of these methods. Some kids have failed in each of these methods. Maybe that is all we need to know. Our students may be best served by a combination of methods, an approach, rather than an either/or debate.

The debate reminds me a little of Swift's politicians contending over which end of the egg to crack first.

The debate reminds me a little of Swift's politicians contending over which end of the egg to crack first. In either event the nourishment is the same no matter how you approach it. Usually there is a lot of truth in each contending model. And probably a little baloney.

Effective management and the transfer of knowledge is an important model, but it is not the end of teaching; it is the beginning. Management gives the teacher enough control and structure to allow kids to be empowered to make dynamic use of knowledge.

If I had to select one or the other of these models, I'd probably choose effective teaching because without structure, you can't do much and beginning teachers probably need as much structure as their students do. But the joy in teaching, the real joy in teaching, is the dynamic and creative use of

knowledge in different ways, to synthesize it into a whole, and to move students' understanding closer to reality. Teachers need to make the important decisions about what our students need to know and how best to teach them. No one else can do it for us.

* Paradigm- (par'a-dim) n. to set up as an example, a model or pattern.

Questions?

Get 'em into the act, or I can't stand the silence.

As teachers, we are a funny lot. Most of the time we prefer a silent, or relatively silent classroom, except when we ask questions. Then the silence bothers us.

I asked a student teacher, "Why do you answer your own questions?"

"Because I can't stand the silence," he said. Then I asked him an involved, complicated question. and observed how long it took him to construct his response, about 15 seconds. I was less interested in the response than in the time it took to respond. It took him a while, but he got the point.

Questions, especially serious questions, require thinking.

Questions, especially serious questions, require thinking. The silence is a positive. Students are taking your questions seriously. It just takes time for them to form an answer, consider the variables, synthesize experience with what they just learned, understand it, and then verbalize a response.

When you ask a question, you are requiring a learner to go from the known to the unknown, capture the unknown, make it his or hers and then go to the next step and respond. None of this is easy; none of this is fast.

Certainly at this point in your training, you know the mechanics of asking questions, but let's take a second to

review them. Pose the question, wait a few seconds for the gray matter to heat up, then call a student's name. Obviously, calling a name first and then asking the question, lets the other twenty-nine kids consider last night's basketball score. You ask questions to get everyone's brain going, not just one student's..

There are many kinds of questions, but in general, they boil down to two types: the fact question- the who did what to whom, when- and the inference question, the question which explains why things happen, examines motivation and characterization, and provides the conceptual framework for fitting facts together. Not what did so and so do, but why so and so did it.

The fact question has fallen into disfavor, and if they are the only questions you ask, they should fall into disfavor...

Fact questions have fallen into disfavor, and if they are the only questions you ask, they should fall into disfavor, but I like them to set the stage for the good questions, the interesting stuff. Researchers often frown at fact questions. They sit in the back of classrooms, and analyze the kinds of questions teachers ask, keep a log of response, and publish the results. But researchers don't go home with kids, don't know who worked how many hours last night, what family crisis developed, which boy friend dumped which girlfriend or the other way around, and so on. If you properly assign a story or homework assignment, give background for the assignment to thirty students, you're doing very well if twenty five or so do the assignment. Ten percent non compliance is not unreasonable. Of course, the saving grace is that it is not

the same ten percent all the time. Of the kids who do the homework, six or seven will sandwich it in between phone calls. So for a teacher to call up the facts the next day is not a bad idea. Additionally, since the facts set the thought questions, they can be used to get the class to focus. Why does Doolittle visit Higgins.....Billy? He wants money. Why.....Harry? For his daughter. You mean he's selling his daughter.....Sam? Yes. Wait a second. Are you offended by that.....Sue? Well, not really. Then, tell me-and this is the question you have been leading up to- how can such an offensive theme be treated as comedy?

... how can such an offensive theme be treated as comedy?

I think it is a good idea to list the facts on the board as they are being developed. That way kids see it, hear it, and write it. It just sticks better that way, and you can refer to these facts as inference questions are developed.

The other thing to remember about asking high level questions is that you have to trust your students. The answer is not always the answer you have in mind. I remember a math teacher telling me about a kid sitting in the back of the room who could answer questions in ways he hadn't even considered. Are the answers wrong? I asked. No, the methods just aren't orthodox, he said. Are the proofs more elegant? I asked. Sure, he said, I just don't know what to do with this kid. Some conversations are just not worth finishing.

The point I'm trying to make is questions are not a game of telling the teacher what he or she wants to know.

Questions should get students to think, not to think about the answer you want. Nor should good questions and good answers be allowed to drift off into the air, never to be retrieved. When I need two or three questions to make a point or to go to a higher level of understanding, I'll have each student write the answers to the questions before discussion. That way each kid has a stake in the discussion, and if it comes to closure, group conclusions can be jotted down into notebooks as well as dissenting thoughts. The key, of course, is not the conclusion, but the logic- the thoughts that the conclusion is based on.

When I was a beginning teacher, around the turn of the last century, I used to write down the answers to high level questions, but it didn't take me long to realize that student answers were sometimes better than mine. After all, thirty minds working in tandem can be better than one. At first I was uncomfortable with that realization Eventually, I threw in with the group. If thirty minds are better, thirty-one should be better still. I believe in the open mind- not open at both ends, but one open enough to accept different points of view. I don't believe there is more than one right answer, but I'm certainly willing to accept the answer can be at a much higher level than I realized. Students can often take you to that higher level, especially if you provide enough structure and enough openness for them to feel comfortable. Nor am I any longer concerned about asking questions I don't know the answer to. "I was thinking about this the other night, and I

I believe in the open mind- not open at both ends, but one open enough t accept different points of view.

don't have the answer, I'd like to know what you think." When kids know their ideas are valued, I am amazed at the depth and enthusiasm of their responses.

Once, when teaching *Oedipus*, I threw out a hypothesis that the blight mentioned by the priest at the beginning of the play is an AIDS type disease. One student argued that AIDS, unlike the blight, doesn't affect trees, crops, animals, and so on. That seemed to carry the day for me. I wasn't expecting much more. Until Beth, an AIDS educator, popped up with this thought: "But it's literature," she said, "read literature as metaphor, and the poet is saying that the disease destroys the generative process, and AIDS does that." Interesting. Students can surprise you. As I said, I gave up the notion that I had to have the answer to ask the question. Probably I did that when I gave up the teacher's desk. It was a long time ago.

"But it's literature," she said, "read literature as metaphor, and the poet is saying that the disease destroys the generative process, and AIDS does that."

The teacher's desk is still there; it's a great place to store stuff, and for students to sit at when they need to spread out, and for me to use before and after class, but I seldom use it during class. If I were a politician, I'd be working the crowd. Or I'll use a student desk in the middle of the classroom, which is where I prefer to be, in the middle of the class, just an older kid in the middle of the room, prematurely bald, with thick glasses.

Recently I was teaching *Young Goodman Brown*, and I asked this question. "Why is it that Goodman Brown is

destroyed by religion, or at least embittered by it, and Dante is saved by it?" I had no idea of the answer.

Frank put up his hand immediately and said, "I think I know. I thought about it last night, and I thought you'd ask that question." The kid knows me better than I do, because I didn't think I'd ask that question. "But, I'd like to hear other opinions first," he said. And after he did, he closed the discussion by saying, "Goodman Brown believes in religion, but Dante believes in God and that makes a difference." It certainly does, I thought and it also makes a difference if teachers believe in the ability of students to answer questions. Why should hypotheses be limited to math and science?

Of course kids are human and things don't always work out the way you planned. Sometimes I don't get an answer to a question. Maybe that's my fault, maybe I didn't prepare the stage well enough for the question. Maybe I didn't ground the facts well enough to prepare for higher level thought, or maybe I've done that kind of lesson a little too often, and there are brains frying out there, and I need to do it differently. Mostly I find that, like the student teacher, I didn't wait long enough. If I repeat the question, or more properly rephrase the question, I find I get answers, and often answers I did not expect. Sometimes the wait is caused because students see something I didn't see, and they are just trying to work it out. During these waits, I let myself be guided by body language. If they are working, I wait; if they are fidgeting, I rephrase. If that doesn't do it, I stop and ask

... he closed the discussion by saying, Goodman Brown believes in religion, but Dante believes in God and that makes a difference.

what the problem is. Often they can tell me, and I can work around it.

It's important to get kids involved in questions and the discussions that derive from those questions. How many kids? All of them. Impossible? Yeah, that's what I thought, too. Many years ago a colleague told me he made contact with each kid every day. It sounded like faculty room talk, but it is possible. If not every kid, at least the great majority. Kids are no different from you and me. To learn, they need to be involved and active. I'll clip the names of the kids I don't get one day to my mark book, and start with them the next. Kids need to know they are liked. And they need to know their efforts are appreciated. After all, any class, including the teacher in that class, is engaged in a common effort.

Teaching *Hamlet*, we were dealing with Gertrude's motivations. Why does she marry Claudius so soon after her husband's death? Why does this bother Hamlet? Standard questions, standard answers. but it popped into my student teacher's head to ask one more question. Do you know anyone like Gertude? Literature is no fun unless the characters live, and the characters don't live unless students see present day connections. Maybe, I thought, she'd get one or two responses. Hands went up like umbrellas in a spring rain. Gertrude-type stories, aunts, my mother's friend, the woman down the block, all marrying quickly after a death or divorce, all in their forties. Interesting, I thought.

Maybe, I thought, she'd get one or two responses. Hands went up like umbrellas in a spring rain.

Experience had taught the student teacher to drive the next question, even if she didn't have the answer to it. What perhaps does tell us about human nature? Silence. Experience had taught her to wait. Finally one girl said to a very quiet classroom, When you begin to get old, you do crazy things. What do you mean? You'll do anything to avoid being lonely. Maybe it's better for Hamlet, if Gertrude doesn't marry Claudius, but she's thinking of herself, and she's afraid to grow old alone. Ask the right question, and kids will give you answers.

Sometime specific questions can be used to move students toward generalizations. Even simple questions with obvious responses can be framed to take students to higher levels of understanding. For example in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* the central conflict is between Gregor and his father, Mr. Samsa. The reasons for the conflict may be too difficult to reach in one step, but you can set the question, and then use simpler questions to explore the conflict. You might try something like the following:

... but she's thinking of herself, and she's afraid of growing old alone.

Speculate. What's the cause of the conflict between Gregor and Mr. Samsa? When you get answers, list them on the board. Can anyone see an underlying cause of the conflict? I'm setting the general question, it's too big a jump to get there yet, and I know that. I'll probably set the question on the side board, not the front board, because I want to separate it; I want it to stand out. Now, I'll start the process of climbing to that answer. First, I want to get kids

to identify with the problem. "I'm not asking for specific names, but in your experience do you know fathers and sons who don't get along?" That's an easy question; a lot of identification there. "How old is Gregor?" "How old is Mr. Samsa?" You'll get answers to these questions, they're easy. The next question begins the climb. "You've told me Mr. Samsa is around fifty years old. What does Mr. Samsa's age tell us about him? What is his over-riding concern?" The same question asked two different ways. If some students can't approach it one way, maybe they can the other way. The questions are asked as a set. No other questions will be asked until those are answered. Some student will eventually say, "He's growing old, he's afraid of dying." That allows me to ask the question I wanted to ask. "Possibly, just possibly, How does Mr. Samsa's fear of death push him to exercise control over Gregor?" and a kid or kids will respond, or at least put together, If he doesn't allow Gregor to grow up, he won't get old. If he doesn't get old, he won't die. "O.K., then. Speculate as to the possible root cause, of the conflict between fathers and sons. Maybe the conflict is not personal, maybe it's generational." If I've done it right, the bell will ring in thirty seconds. They already have their homework assignment. I have a very quick review and a very interesting starting point the next day.

Questions can be used as part of your lesson to awaken student understanding. Entire lessons can be structured around questions. These discussion type lessons

to be successful need careful planning. For example in social studies, your objective may be to understand American involvement in the Vietnam war. Your question might be, "Since American vital interests were not involved in Vietnam, why did the U. S. pursue a policy of war?"

"Since American vital interests were not involved in Vietnam, why did the U. S. pursue a policy of war?"

If all works well, your students will come to the realization that, although U. S. interests were not strictly speaking involved, American leadership thought they were and acted that way. It's a situation of the reality being the reality, and the misperception leading to disaster. An interesting concept for a kid to understand.

Or, your question might be "What were the political reasons for the South seceding from the Union?" or perhaps a little more interesting question, "Did the South have the right to secede from the Union?" These kinds of question can lead students to an understanding of human motives, fear, greed, and false hopes better than a mere recitation of facts.

These kinds of question can lead students to an understanding of human motives, fear, greed, and false hopes better than a mere recitation of facts.

Sometimes, discussion-type lessons start well and end poorly. Maybe it's asking a lot of a class to focus for forty minutes on abstractions. Many teachers are comfortable with discussions that last an entire period, and many are comfortable with discussions of shorter duration. It is a matter of personality, but no matter how you approach it, discussion lessons must be planned carefully.

Discussions seem to work best when questions are set for students to consider in advance. Teachers who use discussion lessons successfully require involvement from all

their students. They prepare students for the discussion with written work or homework and are sure to get at least one response from each kid. Unusual, good, even divergent responses should be listed on the board. These questions and answers can be used to drive concepts to a higher level of understanding. Discussions and questions are not ends in themselves, just steps along the way.

What to Teach?

Most educational research revolves around how kids learn and how best to teach them. And it's pretty good research, it works. Sure, you can't measure the dedication of a particular teacher or the experiential background of a group of students, but given the fact there are variables, human nature is a constant, and, generally speaking, what works, works. My concern, and perhaps it is a lone voice, isn't how students will be taught in the future, it's what they'll be taught .

My concern, and perhaps it is a lon voice, isn't how students will be taught in the future, it's what they'l be taught .

What to teach is as important as how to teach. This problem has been exacerbated in recent years. We believe, sometimes without thinking about it too deeply, that relevant material will hold our students' interest. When I see the word relevant, I'm reminded of Oscar Wilde's epigram: "Nothing is as unfashionable as fashion. It goes out of style too quickly." Or Yogi Berra's saying, "Nobody goes there anymore, it's too crowded." Relevant is important to time and place. Time and place change, people endure.

I recall a department head collecting grammar books at the end of the year to be sure they would never be used again. At least he had the common decency not to burn them. That year, my eighth grade kids wrote 18 book reports, one every other week, 15 serious essays, and read 6 novels in class, one of which was *Billy Budd.* In addition, they were

writing all the time. To produce all of this finished product, my guess is that each kid wrote about 15,000 words during the year. Good grammar is the result of good writing, but sometimes you can work both sides of the street. By the way, the students were bored the following year with transformational grammar. They already knew how to generate language.

The point I am trying to make is what we teach is every bit as important as how we teach it, and it is legitimate to question the curriculum. If we can debate teaching the classics, we can debate teaching modern pieces. At a recent conference I mentioned teaching the *Iliad*. "Why teach the *Iliad*? What happened in a war 3200 years ago is hardly relevant. Wouldn't kids learn more from a modern novel?" a colleague asked. Of course, there are many modern pieces students can learn from, but I can't think of one that will be read 3,000 years from now. The *Iliad* is not about an ancient war. It is about people. My theme, the author says, is the anger of Achilles and Achilles is not angry about Brieses, although the loss of a girlfriend or boyfriend is pretty important to a seventeen year old. He is angry about mortality. The gods, no matter how immoral, are immortal; humans, no matter how good, are mortal. Show me a seventeen year old who can't understand that problem. Young people, for whom all is possible, face mortality with more anger than the very old, for whom less is possible.

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Young people, for whom all is possible, face mortality with more anger than the very old, for whom little is possible.

At a time when we are trying to cope without traditional values, even without the traditional family, I can't think of a more relevant drama than *Oedipus.* Things that are important for people to know are what we ought to teach. Consider the argument between Oedipus and Tiresias, which is the argument between philosophy and science against religion. Oedipus, the questioner, the philosopher, the scientist and Tiresais, the priest, the blind man who can understand, who can see beyond the physical. Is this not the essential conflict of the intellectual and emotional history of man? When we leave this wisdom on the library shelf, we cut our students off from all that has gone before, and ask them to risk all that is to come. What is "relevant" goes out of fashion too damn quickly.

What is "relevant" goes out of fashion too damn quickly.

What we teach has great value for our students for the rest of their lives. They need to think, but they also need stuff to think about. They need to know what great minds thought. To say Sophocles or Shakespeare or Swift or Kafka or Newton or Pascal have nothing to say to us is to believe that the human mind is unimportant. If we do not teach important things, we say to our students, who believe in us as teachers, that there are no important things. We're saying to them, they must reinvent the wheel for themselves. The contribution that schools make to society is diminished when teachers believe and act as if they have nothing important to say.

If we do not teach important things, we say to our students, who believe in us as teachers, that there are no important things.

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Why, then, don't we teach these pieces? Because they are too difficult for our students to understand? Yes, some of the pieces are difficult, but there are teaching techniques which reduce the level of difficulty, and some frequently passed-over works are very easy to read. For example, Moliere's *Doctor in Spite of Himself* is a wonderful farce, enjoyable, with great themes to play with, and a readability of grade 7.

Our students- ALL of them- need to read important pieces because they have things to learn about themselves and life from literature, and with teaching, they are able to read these pieces, and learn from them.

The poets, especially the epic poets, have sweet songs to sing- so sweet and so evocative that Plato would ban them from his Republic. Today, technology stands where Plato stood. We have no need for appeals to the imagination, no need to explain ourselves in terms of poetry. We have great faith that philosophy and technology will solve our problems. Maybe. But, to cut ourselves off from our metaphors, our imaginative understanding of our lives diminishes us. Besides, as we all know, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Students have as strong a need to know as we have to teach. Why not teach the most complex and intricate questions about ourselves and the fascinating answers. These are the real things students want to learn.

The poets, especially the epic poets, have had sweet songs to sing- so sweet and so evocative that Plato would ban them from his Republic.

Homework

Homework, Notebooks, Quizzes, Classroom Decorations- Instructional Devices All

Homework, notebooks, quizzes, and classroom decorations are instructional devices and should be recognized as such. From portfolio assessment to simple homework assignments, they create active learning opportunities for your students. To be effective, these assignments need to be given and evaluated on a daily basis. Even when homework is not written, the results have to be evaluated. I've taught all grades from seventh to graduate school, and human nature remains the same. If work doesn't have to be done, it won't be. If you build it, they will come. If you assign it, evaluate it, and return it, they will do it.

If work doesn't have to be done, it won't be.

Even when homework is a long-range project, it has to be monitored. Kids have to be focused on it; otherwise, it doesn't get done by approximately fifteen percent of your students. You're then in the position of having to disregard your own assignment or having to fail a large percentage of your students. Neither of these prospects is pleasant.

To be effective homework assignments need to be energized and varied. Mindless repetition of assignments will bore you and your students. Assign homework creatively. Some assignments, for example, can be given as a quiz, and marked accordingly. I see nothing wrong with doing this.

To be effective homework assignments need to be energized and varied.

Some students enjoy these assignments because without time pressure they can do well. Yet some teachers tell me they do not like marking assignments completed outside the classroom which they cannot monitor. I don't understand this since most of a student's future learning and work will occur outside a classroom. Besides, that kind of logic establishes an adversarial attitude between teacher and student rather than a collaborative venture. Your job is to create strategies that allow kids to learn, not to defend the validity of the bell shaped curve, which works well enough on its own.

Many of my homework assignments are marked in the following way: if the paper is acceptable, it is checked, and recorded in the mark book, and returned. If it's a superior paper, it gets a +1; an inferior one receives a -1. I add the plusses and minuses to the quarterly mark. Students become excited about this because they view assignments not as busy work, but as creative work which allows them to excel. I've found so-called marginal students who are serious about their homework go from a C+ to a B+.

To be effective, homework should be evaluated and returned the next day.

To be effective, homework should be evaluated and returned the next day. You need feedback from the kids about the job you're doing, and kids need feedback from you. The flow of homework papers back and forth becomes part of that feedback as well as an important instructional tool. These papers help students focus on work, provide summaries and closure, and act as springboards to new learning. If you have a student forty minutes a day, and you

can engage that student for thirty minutes on a meaningful homework assignment, you've almost doubled your instructional time. Can you think of a more important tool?

If an assignment is not turned in, I return a piece of paper with the student's name on it, the date, the assignment, and a zero clearly written on top. The student can make up the homework to a check as can the student with a minus one. I usually give them a week to make up work, and I see nothing wrong with extending that, if there is a good reason to do so. Since the marks are recorded the day they are due, the grace period is easily counted. But if the work is not made up, the zero becomes part of the student's mark, and is counted as a quiz. I found it essential to return a paper with the kid's name and a zero on it. Otherwise students don't believe you're serious. If a kid is absent, I return a paper with "abs" and the assignment written on it and the student knows the work must be made up.

Homework is easy to assign, but difficult to mark. Consider the scope of the problem. If you have 150 students, and spend one minute marking a paper each night, you have spent more than 2 hours just on homework papers. In addition to that, you have three preps, maybe four. If you've taught the course before and /or know the material well, you can hold your preps to twenty or thirty minutes each. Now you're looking at four hours work, and you haven't marked tests or essays. You haven't kept up with the field, you haven't prepared tests or quizzes; you haven't done anything

Homework is easy to assign, but difficult to mark. Consider the scope of the problem: you have 150 students, if you spend one minute a paper each night, you have spent 2 1/2 hours, just on homework papers.

creative. You can see the magnitude of the problem. The obvious reason homework tends not to get marked is that it is time-consuming. A first year teacher wondered, "You want me to all this and teach, too?" The answer is, yes.

There is no way around this problem except to be an efficient user of time- twenty minutes at the end of the day, twenty minutes at the beginning of the day, working during your prep period rather than spending it in the faculty room. If you work efficiently throughout the day, you can keep up. Teaching is not a job for people with a nine to five mentality. Sure July and August and built-in holidays seem a dream job from a college classroom, but the reality is that you will work as many hours as other professionals. The bad news is you'll do it in ten months, not twelve. A suggestion. It easier to finish work at your desk at the end of day, than to pack it up, take it home, unpack it, mark it, repack it and carry it back. There are also side-benefits to this. When you go home, your day is over and there is less risk of burnout. Papers you have yet to mark don't hang over your head during dinner, and when kids learn you stay late, they generally drop by and talk. Usually about school work, but often about what's really on their minds. You'll be surprised at what they'll tell you. I always am.

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Notebooks

How important is it for kids to keep notebooks? Do they have educational value? If you believe students learn by being engaged with material, then you should require them to keep notebooks. Notebooks provide opportunities for students to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning. Students do not own their textbooks, but they own their notebooks. As your course develops, that is, as it builds on what's known and goes to the new, and builds on that, there must be a place to store handouts, supplemental material, notes, worksheets, and for students to develop their own thoughts about your course.

If you believe students learn by being engaged with material, then you should require them to keep notebooks.

I encourage students to take notes about everything they deem important, and insist they take note on everything I deem important. I number and date the entries- at least mine. These entries consist of story grammar, work sheets, questions for discussion, notes, and background material.

Some teachers require kids to have notebooks, but are informal about it. Notebooks can be kept informally, but I've found formal notebooks are more effective and more useful for me, and, I suspect, for beginning teachers. A word of advice. Keep notebooks simple, at least in the beginning, until you become accustomed to dealing with them. If they are too complex, you may be tempted to abandon them.

Figuring out how to use notebooks is just common sense. Divide the notebook into sections. In addition to the

main part of the notebook, I require students keep a section for vocabulary, for writing hints, for grammar, and a large journal section. Teachers from other disciplines can easily find ways to logically divide their notebooks.

The more I use journals, the more I like them, and find ways to expand their use. I've changed the way I use them, though. I have kids hand in the current journal page as an assignment or class work regularly. I comment on journal entries almost immediately, and return them, rather than waiting weeks to collect the entire journal. Kids are like everybody else, they like immediate feedback. By being able to comment quickly, the journal dialogue between me and my students becomes more interesting.

I mark notebooks every ten to fifteen entries, about once a marking quarter. I make it a major mark to encourage kids to keep good notebooks, and I decided to weight my entries 80% and kids entries 20%. Maybe kids entries should count more. After 38 years, I'm still changing things. I do know what kids deem important is as valid as what I deem important. In any event, the possession of a notebook, with a teacher part and a student part gives kids empowerment in the class, gives them a voice, and gives them a stake in what goes on.

I do know what kids deem important is as valid as what I deem important.

Quizzes, Tests, Etc.

I've never considered a quiz, test, essay, report, project or something similar as anything but an instructional tool, as valid for instruction as for assessment. These instruments, like homework, are part of the communication that goes on between students and teachers.

I just never felt comfortable without a lot of marks. It seems to me that four or five marks over a marking period isn't as much fun as 20 or 30, and doesn't give me as much direction as to where my teaching should go. Nor does it give enough feedback as to how effective I am. Marks may tell kids things, but they also tell teachers things.

If you want kids to be serious about your class, you have to convince them you're serious abou it.

I also believe the ability to generate marks should not interfere with teaching time. You can give take home quizzes, mark homework as quizzes, give open book quizzes, give a number of five minute quizzes, followed-up with essays done outside of class, etc. If you want kids to be serious about your class, you have to convince them you're serious about it. A lot of papers going back and forth is one of the ways to do that.

Kids also have a tendency to respond positively when their contributions, their writings, their thoughts, their essays are valued and shared. All the paperwork has an unintended good effect. Students learn they can't get through the course without working, without carrying on a dialogue with you

and that dialogue validates the effort and work they have contributed to the course

Fun is a key element of teaching.

One teacher I knew loved sneak quizzes. When he wore his Mickey-Mouse tie, kids knew there was a sneak quiz scheduled. This kind of eccentricity and assessment gets kids talking about you and your class. That is always a plus, and it adds to the fun of a classroom, but if you decide to go that route be comfortable with the eccentricity you develop. Students need to laugh with you, not at you. Fun is a key element of teaching. If you don't find yourself enjoying the hell out of the job, rethink your practices.

Classroom Decoration

My response to classroom decoration is, the more the better. Decorations keep everything you teach in focus all year. Kids become immersed in the material, which are a constant visual reminder of the year's work and an instructional tool at the same time. They illustrate what you're teaching, and use your student's creative energy.

You'll be amazed at what student can do with classroom decorations.

Usually these decoration are a matter of teacher taste. It seems to me it works better if it is a matter of student taste, to a degree anyway. When teachers decorate the room, for a student it is like walking into mom and dad's living room. When kids decorate a room, it's like walking into a

clubhouse. If you have provided sufficient structure, you can get away with a clubhouse effect. If you haven't, living rooms are not bad places to be.

Many teachers decorate their rooms a couple of days before class begins, and I think it is a good idea. Kids who walk into a decorated classroom must realize someone cares. I let kids decorate as the year progresses, but it is a matter of style.

Kids who walk into a decorated classroom must realize someone cares.

In addition to the ongoing decorations, I have a permanent collection of material- two 8 by 10 murals in the back of my room, one depicting Dante's Inferno, the other Dante's Paradisio, both done by kids in lower level non-regents basic track classes They have been up for eight years, without a touch of graffiti. On the closet door is Hamlet as he appears in Ophelia's closet- the irony was too good to resist. There is a picture of Oedipus on the front wall, done by a kid who wasn't my student, who just wanted to leave something behind. I have two watercolors; one is the best picture of Kafka's Gregor that I've ever seen, and the other is a brilliant interpretation of the death of Hector, both done by the same kid. I have a portrait of Ibsen's Nora. I think the student interpreted Nora better than Ibsen did. There's a Trojan horse, an Oedipus mask with Asiatic features, and so on. These are always there, but the rest of the decorations, the posters, the pictures, the mobiles, the essays are added as the year progresses. Everybody contributes. Nothing ever comes down until the end of the year.

Sometimes it gets a little too messy even for me, and by March we run out of wall space, and I think about pasting student work on the ceiling. That's a real pest, but it is a room kids feel comfortable coming into.

Can Johnny Read That?

All professionals have their unexamined beliefs, and secondary school teachers are not exceptions. Probably their most popular belief is, Johnny has been taught to read by grade five or six, and if he hasn't learned, there is not much a middle or secondary school teacher can do to help. Besides, reading is a process. I teach subject, not process. Send me readers, and I'll give you scholars.

Like most prejudices, this one seems reasonable enough on the surface, but it doesn't hold up under careful examination. Besides, most high school texts are written at a tenth or twelfth grade reading level, and formal reading instruction stops at grade six. Even if Johnny is a grade level reader at grade six, how does he climb to become a tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade reader in order to read the textbook for a secondary class? Along with the prejudice, secondary teachers sing a chorus in every high school faculty room in America, the-how-do-you-expect-me-to-teach-them-if-they-can't-read-the-text book- blues.

Well, relax, most schools do a pretty good job teaching reading. Yet, no matter how good a job they do, some kids, no matter what instructional system used, do not learn to read as well as we would like. Nor is there a simple solution to this problem because these cases of reading difficulty seldom have a single cause. Reading disability tends

Nor is there a simple solution to this problem because these cases of reading difficulty seldom have a single cause.

to be multi-caused. Physical, neurological, social, educational, emotional- all or some of these factors conspire together in varying degrees to prevent students from learning to read to their expectancy. And it is not a minor problem. If reading disability affects ten percent of your students, and that is probably a reasonable estimate, then in a classroom of thirty kids, at least three will have experienced more than ordinary difficulty learning to read. In some classrooms the percentage will be much higher. To the classroom teacher, the cause of the disability is not as important as the result; that is, what to do with students who cannot read the text adequately.

Literacy drives our educational system. Poor and non-readers fall behind quickly, and the distance increases every year. Inability to learn to read affects students emotionally, educationally, and economically for the rest of their lives.

... there is a great deal the classroom teacher can do to help these kids read better.

All right, you say, true and sad enough, but what does that have to do with me as a subject teacher? In certain cases of extreme disability, what you can do in a middle school or a secondary school classroom may be limited, but in many cases, there is a great deal the classroom teacher can do to help these kids read better. By the time a student reaches grade six or seven, or higher, seldom are they non-readers. They have learned some reading skills, although usually there are gaps in their knowledge, and their strategies are limited, but they are not totally ignorant. And they have also learned to avoid the problem. Why do something I do not do well?

Do you like ODQ's, Ordinary differential equations? I don't, I never met one I enjoyed, but engineers and mathematicians sit around bars solving them for fun. Let's say that schools weren't reading driven, but ODQ driven.

So what, you say. If I have to learn how to solve them, I would. No doubt you would. But a few of us, a different few from the reading disabled would be left by the wayside. Oh, we'd learn a little, and if our papers were neat, we might even pass on partial credit. But we might not trust ourselves as learners any more than some kids trust themselves as readers. If our ODQ solving ability affected the rest of our lives, we might get a little defensive, too.

Reading disability is a problem schools have to live with while at the same time trying to solve.

Reading disability is a problem schools have to live with while at the same time trying to solve. No single method or combination of instructional methods of teaching reading are completely successful with all kids. But, quite a few of these kids have learned enough by the time they reach the upper grades to make reading progress, which paradoxically is when reading instruction is often curtailed, placing an additional instructional burden on subject matter teachers.

These kids have some reading abilit Capitalize on it.

What can you do in a regular classroom to help these kids? As in any teaching situation, use the assets that you have. These kids have some reading ability. Capitalize on it. For example, perhaps seventy percent of the words on a seventh grade reading level are the same basic two to three hundred words that appear on a third grade list. That's a

major start. If students know these words without mediation, that is at sight, without hesitation, you can solve some of your students reading problems (see appendix for a list of these words.) If you are a sixth, or seventh grade teacher, teaching lower level kids, think of ways to teach these words, directly and indirectly. Embed them in drills and games. Since these words are basic to communication by having your kids write a lot, these words will appear again and again. If kids can write them, they can read them.

Most older kids with reading problems kids lack mediated word recognition skills. They can't figure out words they don't recognize immediately. Sometimes they can't get past the initial consonant sound of words they don't recognize by sight. But you can help. You can teach word recognition skills even if you are not a reading teacher. When teaching vocabulary, emphasize syllabication skills. List the words on the board, pronounce them, talk about syllable division. Make a big thing of this; get kids involved. Encourage them to get past the initial consonant sound, and to look for pronounceable groups of letters in words. Don't worry about teaching all the rules you can think of, but teach a few rules that seem to help students figure out words. Vowel/consonant/vowel (a/go) and vowel-consonant/consonant'vowel (com/ment) are two rules whose understanding seem to make a major difference in increasing students' ability to recognize words.

Don't worry about teaching all th rules you can think of , but teach few rules that seem to help students figure out words.

Another important strategy is to teach common word endings. Often kids are comfortable attacking the beginnings of words, but their skills break down at the end of words. If you can teach common endings, you can help students overcome this problem. Many six-seventh grade disabled readers aren't sure of the pronunciation of common endings. Again, keep it simple. "Tion" is pronounced "shun," "el," "le," "il," and "ul" at the ends of words are all pronounced the same way. "Ly" at the end of a word is pronounced *lee*. These are simple, but important word recognition skills, which, if well known, will allow your students to concentrate on decoding the unknown. It all helps.

Remember, most of the words kids are having trouble reading are part of their speaking and listening vocabulary, but not part of their reading vocabulary. They need help in making that recognition transition, and often they can do so. These small things can sometimes yield very significant results.

Since most of these kids have some skills, quantity is critical for them. The more they deal with printed language, the more words they see and decode, the better their chances are to improve their skills. Remember, as poor readers with low expectations and marginal success, they have read less than other students. It's one of the reasons they keep falling behind. Kids need to successfully engage with words and develop their own mediated word recognition strategies.

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After basic reading skills are learned, kids' reading ability improves with practice. Success breeds success.

In order to help students with marginal reading skills secondary teachers need to be able to determine if a text is suitable for a particular class. In most subject areas- math, science, social studies, English- your major concern is pragmatic: can my kids read the text? If not, how can I reduce the readability of the text so they can read it? Readability, in concept, is a reading level that matches a grade level. A readability of grade five would be appropriate for a student receiving instruction at a fifth grade level. But, readability is not an exact science, and after a student becomes a fluent reader, it may not be an issue. Its measurement is probably more accurate at lower grade levels than at higher ones. In its simplest form, readability is a measure of vocabulary and sentence length, and there are many formulas used to gauge the readability of textbook material. None of them is perfect. Studies gauging the same text sample by different formulas will probably yield different reading levels. If you know the formulas and their weaknesses, you can probably get a general idea of the readability of the material. But your concern is not the readability of the text, as such, but the ability of your students to read the text.

To complicate the assessment of texts, there are factors which cannot be easily measured. The formulas tend to be more accurate for narrative than expository material,

Readability, in concept, is a reading level that matches a grade level.

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and most middle school or secondary school teacher materials are expository. The most difficult part of readability measurement is thought per word density, which complicates material, and is more heavily loaded in expository writing. Even the position of more difficult material changes the readability. If complex writing appears at the beginning of the article, the readability is more difficult than if the complexity is at the end of the article. The reason is obvious, and has important implications for teaching. When easier material is at the beginning of the text, the reader has a focus and background information against which to apply experience and intelligence. When difficult material is at the beginning of the article, that opportunity is denied.

If complex writing appears at the beginning of the article, the readability is more difficult than if the complexity is at the end of the article.

When teachers talk about reading, they usually talk about two kinds of activities, or more accurately, the same activity applied differently. The first activity, learning to read, learning to recognize enough words by sight, so the reader can process ideas quickly, and learning enough rules, language patterns and syntax to decipher the rest of the words. The second kind of reading, reading to learn, is the activity that concerns most middle school and secondary school teacher teachers.

In a typical tenth or eleventh grade classroom, a teacher can expect to find a reading range from grade seven or lower to grade fourteen. But, the kid with a low reading level probably has enough skills to be helped along and even to improve. It is rare that kids do not have at least some basic

skills by this point. It is a common prejudice that kids who do not learn to read by secondary school will never learn to read. I've seen kids with no measurable reading level in grade eight, read to the tenth grade level and above by the time they were graduated.

What does all this mean for our teaching? It means we need to consider our reading assignments with great care. Our concern here isn't detailed reading diagnosis but determining if kids can read their textbook. There is an easy way to do that. Ask them.

Have them read orally. No, not a round robin-that would bore you and them- but during the first few weeks, try to get each kid to read a sample of about a hundred words, or so. If your kids are making four or five errors per hundred words of text, you'll need some careful preparation for reading assignments. The correlation between oral and silent reading is close enough for you to make a generalization about what is happening when a kid reads silently. It is not too scientific, but accurate enough for your purposes.

A teen who has a reading problem has been living with it for a long time, and is probably pretty sensitive about it.

When asking kids to read orally, you don't want to embarrass anyone. A teen who has a reading problem has been living with it for a long time, and is probably pretty sensitive about it. In a group of thirty kids, you may find one or two with valid reasons for not wanting to read orally. You'll probably be alerted to a major problem within a few words. If a kid refuses to read, don't treat it as a challenge, and don't make it a big deal. Talk to the student privately,

check the records, see what help the student's received and what is available, and if appropriate, make a referral.

What can you do to make the textbook more readable? First, determine your kids reading rate, how many words a minute do they read? Determine the average number of words per page in your text, and gear the length of your assignment to their grade level and rate. Kids will let you know if you're moving too fast or too slowly, but you need to push them a little, otherwise they won't learn. Teaching is controlling frustration. If material is too easy, there's nothing to learn; if it's too difficult, it's impossible to learn.

Determine what it is kids need to know from a reading assignment you intend to give.

Determine what it is kids need to know from a reading assignment you intend to give. What are the facts, what are the inferences, what are the connections? And what is in the text that will prevent learning from occurring? Unfamiliar words? Pre-teach vocabulary. Too much information to be easily digested? Provide an outline. Complex organization? Provide a chart.

Your reading assignments will get more attention from kids if you make them responsible for it. Try guiding them through the reading with questions, which require answers and which will focus their attention. A reading assignment that is not checked in some way will not be done.

Your reading assignments will get more attention from kids if you make them responsible for it.

Guiding kids through a text is more easily said than done. To do it well, you need to understand how people get information from reading. While there are many variations on the theme, there are two major models, and good readers use

both. First, there is the Bottoms Up model, which is a mechanical word recognition process.. The reader converts letters into words, words into sentences, sentences into ideas, observes the structure of the ideas and absorbs them into knowledge. It is a slow, mechanical process and it is how beginning and poor readers function all the time. Good readers process unfamiliar material this way. Consider how you, a good reader, read easily through light fiction, and slowly and carefully through complicated text loaded with unfamiliar words, phrases, and concepts.

The second model ,usually called Top-Down, is more interactive. The fluent reader brings background, experience, and knowledge of language and syntax to the material. He reads to confirm his hypothesis about the material. This is how we all read light fiction, and how a professor might read that text that slowed you down in the last paragraph.

Consider how you, a good reader, read easily through light fiction, an slowly and carefully through complicated text loaded with unfamiliar words, phrases, and concepts.

Consider the light fiction book again. The villain leaves the room. He closes the door. In the Top down model, the eye of the fluent reader checks out the "cl", concluded the word close, probably doesn't bother with the word "the", sees the "d", concludes door, not window, and is busy on the next sentence. The poor reader sounds out closes, recognizes the, and with these two clues is able to figure out door- a slow process. My guess is the fluent reader does everything ascribed to him in the Top Down model, but from a superior understanding of language, rather than only from hypothesis testing.

If reading rate, that is reading speed, is very slow, say 70 to 80 words a minute, the reader probably cannot handle the material. With so much time and energy going into the mechanical word recognition process, there is little energy left to into the thought process. There isn't enough information being stored quickly enough in short term memory to process into ideas.

How, then, to help your students read through the assignment? What you want to be sure happens, or what you want to be sure your students do is function from a Top Down, not a Bottoms Up, model. Try to give your students some background, some familiarity with the text to reduce the level of reading difficulty and to allow students to bring their knowledge and experience to the text.

Try to give your students some background , some familiarity with the text...

There are some obvious ways to do this:

a) Vocabulary Pre-teach unfamiliar words or familiar words used in an unfamiliar way.

b) Quick look at the chapter. Guide students through headings, topics, subtopics, captions pictures and charts. This helps reduce the level of reading difficulty by giving the student a sense of the material and a sense of the author's organization.

c) Brief Summary. Summarize what information they should look for.

d) Questions to be answered derived from the text.

e) A cloze procedure based on the text.

f) Organizational Outline.

In other words, reduce the readability by providing information, road signs, and guidelines prior to reading.

We often hear kids say, "I read it, but I forgot it." This is not unusual. One way or another, we all forget a great deal of what we read. Work around the problem by building a writing/note-taking/question-answering/outlining component into the assignment. Mostly, you want to train kids to read, pen in hand, especially when reading expository material. It is just more efficient to read with a note-taking component of some type, than it is to just read. You'll get more impact from your reading assignments. The need to take notes diminishes to some extent when reading narrative material, but it doesn't disappear. While narrative material is generally easier to read than exposition, narrative is still read for a purpose in addition to the story line. There is theme, characterization, and metaphor. Kids need to learn from the story, and should have pen in hand while reading to respond to questions posed about the assignment.

When you assign this kind of exercise, questions should flow with the text; that is, questions should be in order. Mixing the order of the questions may be great for a review, when you have already gone through the material, but not for an introductory lesson. Your principal purpose is to guide the reading, to make the writer's organization stand

It is just more efficient to read with a note-taking component of some type, than it is to just read.

out, so the student can understand the organization and understand the material.

Teachers, trying to cope with students who have poor reading skills, sometimes "dumb down" instruction, believing they are helping these students. They don't realize that most of these kids have normal or above normal ability and have every right to be instructed in the complex realities of life. How best to take the abstractions, the concepts, the themes of literature to these kids? By reducing them to known entities. By relating these things to experiences students can understand. Let's go back to Oedipus for a minute. We said before that Oedipus is the questioner. However you want to place the questioner, either as a philosopher or as a scientist isn't important since the words were interchangeable in the ancient world. He stands for man's pushing back barriers, enlarging man's knowledge and man's control over the world. The family he comes from is cursed, probably because they stepped over the line, got too close to the gods, wanted to be more divine than human. But isn't that what we all want? To know more, to have more control over things, and do we not often pay a price for that? Practical science has given us a better life in many ways, but in some ways it's taken things from us. As we said before, we tend to be more isolated, more alienated. Can kids relate to those themes as they try to find themselves? I think so. Kids are always asking themselves, what happens when I push the boundaries? What I'm trying to say, and perhaps not saying very well, is that the

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questions literature raises and tries to answer are questions all of us ask ourselves. The same is true in science and history and math. Not to explore these questions and answers, cuts our students off from some very hard-won human knowledge. Oedipus asks the most basic question of all. What is our place in the universe?

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The problem teachers have, of course, is how to deal with the complex texts of literature, math, science, and social studies. These texts are usually more difficult to read than readability formulas indicate. It is impossible to determine the complexity of metaphors and figurative language, or to measure prior knowledge needed to completely understand concepts, but these skills can be taught.

In addition to pre- teaching vocabulary, teachers you can pre- teach themes. Often I'll begin *Hamlet* with a journal entry, without mentioning the name of the piece. This way I let students deal with themes, concepts, and hypotheses before they are attached to a piece of literature, an era or a theory. The themes and concepts and their relationships are what students need to understand, anyway.

The background for the journal entry goes something like this: Imagine that you are twenty three or twenty four years old, an anthropology student, deep in the jungle, away from home, when you get word that your father has died. Neither transportation nor communication is immediately available. After you get home, your mother remarries.

Marries your uncle, who is closer to her age than your father was. Your father was a very powerful and wealthy man, and you find your mother has voted the family stock to your uncle and your uncle is running the family business. You're told you will inherit eventually, but you don't believe that. On top of all of this, your girlfriend wants nothing to do with you. You aren't sure, but it looks like she has lost her waistline. You want to go back to the jungle, but you are denied permission, and your funds are cut off. Oh, one more thing, some people tell you your father's ghost has been walking up and down Main Street at night, and doesn't seem to be too happy.

I think it's a good idea to list these facts on the board so students don't lose sight of them, and then ask students to write and react to this situation. Often they will react just like Hamlet. I'd go crazy. Commit suicide. Kill my uncle. Leave anyway. Hate mother. Hate my girlfriend, etc.

So the plot's been introduced, the students engaged, and the title hasn't been mentioned. All of this begins to reduce language complexity and makes the material easier to read and to understand.

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Social studies teachers often use this thematic introduction. Consider the effect of reading a letter without mentioning time or place from someone who experienced the terrible privations of that dreadful winter following Germanys' surrender after the Great War. And then add Nietzsche's concept of the superman. Suddenly, Nazism becomes not an aberration, but a phenomenon from the history, psychology, and philosophy of man..

Text complexity can be reduced in many other ways. Students need to know, really know characters and facts if they are to abstract from them. They can't really understand what is going on if the characters and their relationships to each other are not clear. Spend time defining them, drilling them. It's never useful to hear a kid say, "Wait a minute, I'm confused. Who is so and so anyway?" Charts, posters, graphic organizers made by students are visual checks to characters, facts, relationships, and themes. Leave them up during tests. Information is important, but less important than what students can do with it.

Summarizing material before reading it also helps reduce complexity as does the judicious use of video tapes. Story grammar after reading functions as a great summary, and gets kids involved with the text while giving teachers an opportunity to review material and set questions for what is to come. Sometimes, I'll put jokes into these story grammars and kids begin to look for them (Oh, what lousy jokes are here this time?) All my kids, for example, know Hamlet has a

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brother named Om, short for omelet, because he's all mixed up. And they know the real meaning of curtains for Polonius. So, it's not stand up comedy, but it sparks interest.

As teachers we need to understand many of our students do not read as well as we would like them to, but with help they are able to deal with complex text and abstract from it what they need to know to understand their course work while at the same time improving their reading skills.

Varying The Presentation.

About 7 years ago, my school had one too few 12th grade classes and one too many 9th grade classes. I was a little apprehensive about the assignment. I was reminded of a friend who taught graduate classes saying, "The sight of an undergraduate upsets me." By the end of the first week of class, I was alive with enthusiasm and the joy of discovery. It was like seeing the world for the first time again. Because the class was different from any I had taught in many years and the curriculum unfamiliar, perhaps I took special pains.

Around December, one of the kids said to me before class, I like coming to this class. "Why?" I asked "Well, it's a little different every day." I went back and analyzed my plans and sure enough, I'd built small variations into the presentations. Reasoning what would work in this class would work in others, I began to build slight changes into all my plans. I think it helped. Like a story that has to be written around a character, a lesson has to be developed around the material, but it doesn't have to be exactly the same development every day. Try slight variations on the theme.

We are creatures of habit, and we tend to teach the same stuff the same way. Consider teaching something as simple as vocabulary, which needs to be taught in every subject area, and is probably an area most of us don't emphasize enough. There are many strategies to use, yet most

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teachers adopt one method and stick to it. But instead of teaching words from lists, we can teach words in context. As previously discussed, teaching words in context has the added benefit of reducing readability when the words are embedded in sentences taken from the text. These embedded sentences provide contextual background and force the learner's mind to deal with and organize the text before actually reading it.. This kind of approach is as important in science, social studies and math as in literature because it reduces thought-word density. If a reader misses a metaphor in literature, the story line can be followed, although its richness is diminished. In science, math, and social studies, if the thought-word density is too complex, the reader loses conceptual material.

By varying the way you present material, you keep student interest, reduce boredom, and allow students t be responsible for their own learning.

By varying the way material is presented, a teacher can keep student interest, reduce boredom, and allow students to be responsible for their own learning. I present vocabulary and other material in different ways, yet I try to build a consistent theme throughout the subtexts.

For example, when teaching vocabulary, I always write the words on the board first, so I can deal with the rules of syllabication which kids should know, but probably don't. I won't continue the lesson until I am sure kids can pronounce the vocabulary words. That's the one constant I insist on. The simplest way to present vocabulary is to copy the embedding sentences from the text, underline the words, and ask kids to determine meaning. When definitions are decided on, the words and meanings can be numbered and recorded in

vocabulary section of each student's notebook. I think all student notebooks, no matter what discipline, should have a vocabulary section. A word of caution. When teaching vocabulary, avoid the trap of having kids look up definitions in a dictionary because the first dictionary definition may not be the one used in the text, there is a motion and time problem in the distribution of dictionaries, and kids already know the alphabet. There is little to be learned. Looking up words in the glossary of your textbook makes more sense because you don't have distribution problems, and the definitions will mirror the use in the text.

Another way to present vocabulary is in matching columns. This process works because a few kids in each class will know the meanings of some of the words, and working together they can usually come up with the answers When doing this kind of exercise, I try to make some of the defining words humorous. Kids begin to look for the humor and become aware of the connotative as well as the denotative meanings of words.

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A third vocabulary approach presents embedding sentences with the vocabulary words missing, perhaps listed on the side of the paper. Kids can use their knowledge of context and grammar to select words. There are many creative ways to teach vocabulary, but no matter how you choose to present vocabulary, and you can do it a little differently each time, close the lesson by having kids write the definition in the vocabulary section of their notebook. By the

time you follow up with a homework assignment or quiz, kids will have seen the word, heard the word, pronounced the word, actively defined the word, and written the definition. It should stick.

These small variations also can help your main lesson. Sometimes the material for the main lesson is too complex for forty minutes, but just fits two thirty minute lessons . By teaching two related activities in a lesson, you reduce the complexity of the material to manageable proportions. Since vocabulary has been used as an advance organizer, concepts can then be followed through the main lesson.

By the time you get back to a method you used before, it will be so long ago it will seem fresh.

Literature, like vocabulary, does not have to be taught the same way. You can introduce literature from the author's point of view, character's point of view, thematic point of view, plot, or an historical point of view. By the time you get back to a method you first used, it will be so long ago, it will seem fresh.

The messages you get from kids will let you know when to vary your plans. It's easy enough to do. Go back and monitor your long range plans. You will begin to see when you are doing the same thing in the same way, again and again..

What part of the classroom you teach from is really a matter of taste, personality, and habit Try changing it to send instructional messages to kids.

In addition to varying your plans, varying your presentation keeps interest. What part of the classroom you teach from is really a matter of taste, personality, and habit Try changing it to send instructional messages to kids. One of the very best teachers I know sits behind the teacher desk

from bell to bell, and absolutely enthralls the class. I cannot work that way. I walk the aisles, use a student desk; other teachers pace the front of the room; still others seem chained to the board. But these are trends. I notice in all good teachers there is a variation in lesson procedure and in presentation. Even the teacher who sits behind the desk, when he wants to make an important point, will stand. I doubt he knows he does it, but his classes know. The signal is obvious: this is an important message. Other good teachers tend to do the same thing. They change position in the classroom, or change pitch, posture, or use a different part of the board. When these changes occur, kids learn this is different, this is important and act accordingly.

Have you noticed how some teachers keep perfect control in what appears to be a very relaxed environment?

Have you noticed how some teachers keep perfect control in what appears to be a very relaxed environment? Kids can fool around, but never seem to go over the line. This control works because there are clues, messages, sometimes unknown to the teacher's consciousness, about where that line is. Dropping of voice, perhaps, or changing position in the classroom, may be all that's needed to remind students about boundaries. These messages keep control unobtrusively.

Instructional messages are sent the same way. If a transition is required in a lesson, knowingly or unknowingly, most teachers send a message. They usually move to the front of the room so they can make eye contact, control the transition , maybe change voice pitch. When the transition is

completed, the teacher usually goes back to where he/she began. These signals become ingrained in the teacher's repertoire. If you do the same thing, the same way all the time there may not be enough clues for kids to figure out what they need to do.

When clues work for us and for students, we tend to repeat them; when they don't, we ought to discard them. Good teachers seem to do these things automatically without analysis, but really, they have learned over time to send messages, and to analyze the effectiveness of these messages. I think good teachers would make good actors, and vice versa. They've learned to avoid what experience has taught them is counterproductive, and to capitalize on what experience has taught them works. All you have to do is find the strategies that work for your personality.

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I recall my first year of teaching. I had an eighth grade honors class, probably never again did I have so many bright kids in one class. They decided to test the new guy and not do their homework. I read them the usual riot act, and they listened in silence. As I fulminated I looked at their impassive faces and wondered if I were doing myself any good or if any riot acts ever do any good? Classroom procedures are fine, they work: maybe riot acts get a little attention, but by themselves they don't keep control. After that day I don't think I've ever used the words, "Next time." Maybe I have, but I don't think so. Some texts advise teachers to engage a misbehaving student's attention and give that kid a choice.

"Are you going to stop doing that, or am I going to. . .?" Take a tip from the ad campaign, just do it. I either enforce discipline on the spot, or I let it go. "The next time." seems to me to be an admission of weakness, and must seem that way to kids, too

Anyway, I read them the riot act; they took it in silence. God knows what they were thinking, but they seemed totally unimpressed. When the class was over, one twelve year old eighth grade boy with a round, happy face who was the appointed leader came up to the teacher desk. The conversation went something like this,

"We get the idea. We wanted to see what you would do. We'll do our homework, but yelling doesn't help."

"Why?" I growled, warming to the prospect like a bear"

"Because teachers don't frighten us, and we know most of you don't keep your threats."

I resented the comment. I wanted to be seen as tough, but the kid was right and by stopping to talk at the end of the period he did me a favor. Maybe we should study our own personalities as well as our students study them, and consider what happens inside a classroom as intensely as they do. Besides, what can we threaten students with? Failure? That happens, of course. And for the most part, it is student failure, not teacher failure. Yet, I can never help but wonder, if I varied my plans, my procedures, did things differently,

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maybe, just maybe, things could have worked out better for that student.

What Works?

Education is one of the few professions where success is no guarantor of continuity. Since our programs are not grounded on a strong bedrock of consistency, we are subject to fads.

At a national conference, I met a teacher who talked enthusiastically about an effective program for at risk and slow learning kids. He said that everyone, even the kids agreed the program worked. The next year, I ran into him again, and asked how the program was going. He said that a new principal came in and gutted it. It didn't have his name on it. I later heard that that principal, now an assistant superintendent in another district, had imported the program he had previously gutted. Why? Because in the new district it would be his program. When such things happen in business, it is only money that is at risk. In education the stakes are higher.

I am willing and eager to change my practices when I am convinced these changes are better for my students, but I am suspicious of wholesale change tied to nothing more than a rising reputation.

Such stories are common, and they have made me leery of fads. I am willing and eager to change my practices when I am convinced these changes are better for my students, but I am suspicious of wholesale change tied to nothing more than a rising reputation.

Once it was popular under stimulus-response learning theory to reward kids with candy, usually M&Ms. And, of course, it worked for awhile. But it did not take too much

genius on the part of kids to figure out what was once a two M&M response could be negotiated to a four M&M response. Talk about grade inflation! Even working double overtime, the M&M factory couldn't meet demand. And then, like the hula hoop, the craze stopped. Kids were sated. A teacher couldn't get them to raise their hand for a truck-load of M&Ms. But it did produce one unintended side effect. Parents all over America picked up their kids after soccer practice and surreptitiously bundled them to clandestine meetings of chocohaulics anonymous.

But it did produce one unintended side effect. Parents all over America picked up their kids after soccer practice and surreptitiously bundled them to clandestine meetings of chocohaulics anonymous.

Then. the "sugar as the enemy of learning" craze hit. Pity the poor student born at the wrong time. Taught to raise a hand to get a day's supply of sugar, and then treated as social leper once the taste developed.

Maybe Dr. Johnson's comment about education is the last words on fads. When asked what would be best to teach a boy first, he answered it didn't matter. While you were debating which leg to put into the trousers first, another man's son has his pants on. All of this has made me an educational pragmatist. While keeping a weather eye on theory, I like to do what works, and let my students tell me how I'm doing.

What works in a classroom? Obviously, organization works. I believe the theory that kids organize new knowledge by the information they have in their head, works. I believe repetition works. I believe going from the known to the unknown works. I believe kids learn best in a structured,

open, and friendly environment. I believe giving kids a sense of cohesion as a class works. I believe getting kids to use information to solve problems works. I believe getting kids actively involved works. I believe getting kids to think and to reflect works. I believe giving kids a stake in their own education works. I believe a teacher's sense of responsibility and involvement with students works.

I remember hearing a kid say of a teacher, "She's crazy. She actually loves all of us." It's not a bad way to be crazy. I believe that works, too.

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Other Subject Methods.

Teachers talk shop when they get together as much as people in any other profession. Sooner or later, even in a social situation, the talk gets around to our students. I'll admit, some of this talk isn't on the highest level, but I've found, without exception, teachers have a real concern for the kids in their care.

Six or so of us meet for dinner once a month. We've been friends for years, and since we are scattered geographically, it's a good way to keep in touch. When I mentioned working on this manual, I got advice from all sides.

Without structure, most of a teacher's time is spent calling the class to attention... and too little time is spent on instruction.

As one, they stressed the importance of classroom management. Without structure, most of a teacher's time is spent calling the class to attention, while trying to cope with procedures, and too little time is spent on instruction. Even the most laid-back of us structures classes, so minor details don't get in the way.

Most of the concerns they mentioned- kids who have problems at home, kids who have difficulty with the textbook, kids who have problems with discipline, homework, testing and so on-are common to all areas and are covered elsewhere in these pages. Each subject area also has its own specific concerns, they said, and I'd like to share some of the most salient ones with you. You may not be directly

involved with the area, be it math, science, or social studies, but read them through. You'll have a richer understanding of the educational process.